



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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PO Box 738
MODBURY SA 5092

info@theatreguide.com.au
ABN : 93 297 960 525

MAMMA MIA

The Metropolitan Musical Theatre Company of SA

Arts Theatre

Until 26 October 2019

Review by Nikki Gaertner

Think of Swedish pop sensations ABBA, and you're sure to think fun – and the Met has certainly captured the right feel, pace and fun in their rendition of this mega-hit musical based on the music of the band. Scene changes are snappily set to music, the spandex jumpsuits are out in force, and the smiles on the cast's faces are most certainly real.

With an experienced production team and very well-seasoned cast of principals, this show should well and truly hit a home run. But what many may not realise is that the songs of Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus are actually a tough sing, and require strong pop-style voices to be able to convincingly pull them off. Yes, we're talking about seventies disco numbers – but we're also talking about strong harmonies, and voices that can display a bit of grit, as well as rise and soar above the sounds of a live rock band.

This is where this production is lacking. Though the cast certainly throw themselves into the vocals, and there are some highlights, the majority of the time the voices either aren't strong enough to cut through the instrumentals, or just sound at odds with the feel of the music. Harmonies aren't clear, or are non-existent, and what should be complimentary backing vocals from the ensemble quickly overpower the individuals on stage. Songs like "Dancing Queen", "Money, Money, Money" and "Super Trouper" lack the expected vocal punch, when these numbers should all be showstoppers that have you wanting to get up on your feet and dance along.

All of this, combined with some sort of deficiency on the band's side of things (either a missing instrument, or a sound balance problem?), result in a show that is fully about the music being left feeling a little lacklustre, rather than polished, bold, loud and glitzy.

This aside, characterisations are relatively strong throughout the principal cast, even though some of the accents may leave you wondering how everyone's back-story fits together...

Trish Hart has fun with the role of Donna, always ready to send up a fun number, whilst really throwing herself into the turmoil and anguish in Act II – culminating in the anthem "The Winner Takes It All", which garnered plenty of cheers from the audience. She and Cassidy Rae Gaiter, who plays Sophie, are well suited and work well together to demonstrate a believable mother-daughter relationship. The only point this connection seems a little broken is during "Slipping Through My Fingers", which should be an absolute tear-jerker, but disappointingly lacks emotional depth – possibly due to too much movement and distraction being set throughout the number.

Gaiter seems the most suited to her characters vocals, and wholeheartedly throws herself into her numbers, building as she goes, with "The Name of the Game" being a particular standout.

Natasha Scholey and Trish Hendrick fit the parts of Donna's comedic sidekicks, Tanya and Rosie, well – and both have plenty of fun with their respective solo numbers in Act II.

Of the three principal men, Brad Martin is the surefire standout as the straight-laced Harry who was once a hard rocker. Martin's impeccable characterisation and comic timing are a pleasure to watch, as is his sweet ballad "Our Last Summer". Alongside him, Lance Jones is suitably rough and bewildered as Bill, and Njal Venning plays quite a laidback and soft version of Sam, but does vocally blend and harmonise nicely with Hart in "S.O.S."

Costumes are colourful, though perhaps a little too much so amidst the whitewash of a Greek island, and it was nice to see a fully built and painted set rather than a reliance on projections. The choreography, though relatively tame, was well executed by the ensemble, but more dancing is needed from the principals (particularly females) to really sell their numbers.

All in all, though not perfect, the entire basis of this show is fun, and this production certainly lets this shine through. If you're a fan of ABBA, and want a feel-good night at the theatre, this is one for you – you'll be sure to end the night with a smile.