



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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Supporting live theatre in South Australia

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## CHICAGO – HIGH SCHOOL EDITION

### Pelican Productions

Thebarton Theatre  
Until 15 August 2021

Review by Brendan Watts

Since 2004 Pelican Productions has been fostering and showcasing talented youth via the medium of musical theatre. Their latest production of Chicago has continued the high quality of their previous shows and director Mim Sarre should be proud of the performances her cast have produced. The iconic musical, based on the play by Maurine Dallas Watkins, follows the stories of Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly. Two murderesses who vie for the spotlight and the headlines, as they try to be acquitted by their lawyer, Billy Flynn.

As with all companies at the moment, Covid has caused unexpected changes, resulting in a last minute move in venue to the Thebarton Theatre. The heritage style charm of this building was well suited to the 1920's themed Chicago, helping to transport the audience back to the age of Jazz. The room really felt the part, from the traditional red hues and simple set of scaffolded stairs and chairs to the title "Chicago" emblazoned across the stage in globes.

Mim Sarre and Jen Frith paid homage to the essence of Cabaret through their costume designs, which although risqué were still appropriate to the age of the cast. This was complemented by the effective use of lighting and blocking in several scenes to accentuate the atmosphere, making the stage transform into a range of different venues.

The ensemble entered the smoke-filled stage as the final audience were settling into their seats, their slow, deliberate movements cutting through the beams of light that pierced the smoky haze. The scene was set for the musical treat that was to follow.

Alana Iannance (Velma Kelly) totally owned her role, right from the first note. Her vocal range and ability to vary her expression created a convincing characterisation. She was perfectly balanced by Rebecca Simpson (Roxie Hart) who lit up the stage with her powerful performance as well. Their use of accents, facial expression and well timed choreography brought a further depth to their respective roles. The strength of their duets providing a real focal point for several of the key musical numbers.

Jaxon Joy brought a genuine naivety to the role of Roxie's downtrodden but loyal husband Amos. He partnered well opposite both Roxie and Billy Flynn, modulating his voice to great effect to achieve the range of emotions necessary for this role. This was most evident during his performance of "Mr. Cellophane", which was received with acclaim by the audience. Quite the crowd pleaser.

From the moment that Monica Horta (Matron "Mama" Morton) strode onto stage bedecked in pearls and draped in red, she made it hers. Her performance was well rounded and her confidence made the character strong and believable.

Sabrina Turtur (June), Carla Bigioli (Mona), Tia Rodger (Annie), Maddie Nunn (Liz) and Tayha Christinson (Hunyak) provided a powerful performance as the "Merry murderesses" in the "Cell Block Tango", ably supported by members of the ensemble in various minor roles.



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The smaller but no less important roles of Mary Sunshine (Samantha Keough), Fred Casely (Ethan Joy) and Kitty Baxter (Megan Harris) were presented confidently and showcased their individual talents well. Through their brief performances as Sergeant Fogarty (Ris Mosel) and the Judge (Benjamin Gray), I am confident that their performances in more senior roles for the remainder of the season will be equally impressive.

With most of the characters being filled by new performers for the remaining shows, they are sure to be strongly anchored by the performance of Alek Kudra as the celebrity lawyer Billy Flynn, self-titled champion of the downtrodden, who does it all for love.. and \$5,000. His charismatic portrayal of this challenging role allowed the other characters and ensemble to combine seamlessly in the larger choreographed numbers. The breadth of his vocal talents was realised in his management of the demanding number "We both reach for the gun".

It would be remiss of me not to highlight the many members of the ensemble, whose ability and discipline to their characters throughout was instrumental in keeping the audience engaged during the larger scenes. The choreographer (Maddison Lochert) and Musical Director (Ben Francis) would both have been proud of the harmonious sounds and synchronous movements that they were able to achieve.

If I was pressed to find an area for improvement, it would be to encourage the leads to avoid rushing their spoken lines. Despite the words remaining distinct and clear, it isn't always a race and the audience can better appreciate the range of emotions that can develop when the delivery slows.

In conclusion a most enjoyable evening of theatre. It is certain that the future of Musical theatre is definitely in safe hands!

Rating: 4.5 Stars (out of 5)