

## OZ

### Hills Youth Theatre

Stirling Community Theatre

Review by Rod Lewis

With over ninety children on stage, one would expect this high-spirited adaptation of L Frank Baum's novel to be overcrowded and clumsy. But with a few masking problems aside, director Judy Sampson has unleashed some impressive talent and created a high-camp, toe-tapping comedy.

Based on a script by the Pioneer Drama Services, this reworking of Dorothy's adventure over the rainbow gets down and funky with new songs and a tighter, shorter retelling than the version most often seen.

Eleven-year-old Kiara Werner was simply superb as Dorothy. In her first major role, she consistently demonstrated that she had the talent and control to take on such a pivotal part. Her ad-libbed reactions to show-stealing Casey (the director's dog playing Toto), never once broke character. Dorothy's three companions, the Scarecrow (Hannah Douglas), Tin Man (Georgia Roberts) and the Cowardly Lion (Emily Morris) all shone like the stars they were. Their comic timing, singing, dancing, and overall delivery were spot on.

At fourteen years of age, Lucy Clayer is someone you wouldn't want to cross, going by the vindictive streak of her Wicked Witch of the West. Her solo number was a showstopper and once she relaxed into the role, she was a delight to watch.

The eldest in the cast was seventeen year old Josh Sanders, playing the almighty wizard, Oz. With more camp than a row of tents, Sanders' played it for laughs and succeeded with every line.

The enormous chorus and other leads kept the action tight and the dialogue flowing. The cute-factor of performing children only carries a show so far, and it was pleasing to note that there was ample, though varying, levels of talent as well.

Becci Schembri's choreography was as diverse as the genre of songs, and each number was executed well. The practical set by Roger Landstrom was quick to change and allowed plenty of space for the masses on stage.

Opening night suffered a number of technical glitches with sound and lighting, all of which should be ironed out after a few performances. Sadly the combination of wayward microphones and an over-loud backing track did drown out several of the songs. Anna Baker's outstanding costumes, combined with makeup by Linda McClelland and Tamara White, more than made up for things however, providing a visual feast and cemented this journey as one of the most fun times to be had in Oz.