



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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Supporting live theatre in South Australia

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## GUYS AND DOLLS

### The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of South Australia

Arts Theatre

Until 10 October 2015

Review by Nikki Gaertner

As a musical, "Guys and Dolls" ultimately has it all. With an entertaining book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, lovable characters by Damon Runyon and fabulous songs by Frank Loesser, there is nothing to dislike about this musical. It is well-known to many, with production after production succeeding on the world's stages, countless awards, and featuring numerous renowned performers over time, such as Vivian Blaine, Jerry Orbach, Nathan Lane, Ewan McGregor and locally, Anthony Warlow and Marina Prior. The 1955 film starred Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando, Vivian Blaine and Jean Simmons.

To say this show holds a special place in this reviewer's heart would be an understatement. After falling in love with it some 20 years ago, and having starred in it three times in various roles, it will always be held dear; and as such it must be said that it will also always be judged to an impeccably high standard.

That said, this production does not disappoint – it is a stellar rendition of this endearing show.

Director Karen Sheldon has her own long history with the show, and this is evident from beginning to end. From the overall design, to the mannerisms and subtle intonations of every character on stage, it is clear this production has been produced by someone who knows and loves it well – and this shines through in every scene.

Visually, this production is stunning. From the contrasting neutral tones of the gamblers' suits and bright reds of the missionaries, to the simple but effective set pieces, and glorious lighting and smoky hues, every scene 'pops' and is strikingly picturesque. Big kudos go to Mark Oakley for lighting design, Elisabeth Arnold for costume coordination and James Nicholson, with Sheldon, for set design.

The show would obviously be nothing without its performers, and there are several winners here. Brendan Cooney nails it in the role of the lovable Nathan Detroit, who just needs to find a place for his crap game – and soon! In what has to be his best performance to date, Cooney totally embodies his character, hits every punch line, and throws in some winning ad libs too!

Opposite him, Jeri Williams is a delightful Miss Adelaide, jumping between cutesy and saucy, pouty and infuriated, and with some tearful moments in between, she quickly wins over the audience's hearts on her way to finally pinning down her man.

Jason Benson is obviously a very young choice for the suave and self-assured Sky Masterson, but opposite an equally youthful Sophia Bubner as Sister Sarah Brown, it works.

Benson's delivery of dialogue and vocals are fairly on-the-money, but he needs to relax into the role a little more physically, with his gestures and movements seeming a bit too pre-meditated and controlled for the spontaneous and confident Sky.

Bubner's Sarah has more punch than frost from the get-go, and gives back as good as she gets despite her straight-laced nature. The role may be a little out of her vocal range, as she does better as a belter,



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but still manages the higher numbers sweetly enough. Her rendition of "If I Were Bell" in Sarah's drunken state is entertaining, though she could stand to let loose even more with this number to contrast her character in prior scenes.

As Detroit's two sidekicks, Nicely Nicely Johnson and Benny Southstreet, Nicholas Bishop and Raymond Cullen are perfectly cast. These two bounce off one another well, and are a joy to watch whenever they are on stage. There are additionally some great performances from Nathan Quadrio as Rusty Charlie in the "Fugue for Tin Horns" opener, Joel Amos as Harry the Horse (complete with whinnying laugh!), and Ian Brown is an endearing Uncle Arvide, particularly with his rendition of "More I Cannot Wish You".

The ensemble are also strong, with the Hot Box Dolls being appropriately squealy, loud and cute, and the male chorus sounding worthy of a studio recording for their backup work in "Luck Be a Lady", which is certainly a showstopper for this reason. Bravo to Musical Director Martin Cheney for making this, and the rest of the show, sound so good!

Kerry Hauber's choreography is stylized and effective, and she works well with the skills of cast. The two Hot Box numbers are particularly enjoyable and well danced by the girls, and the "Crapshooter's Dance" works surprisingly well, with relatively simple movements that keep the guys moving together well. Her biggest success however is with "Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat", with her moves, along with Bishop's performance and the chorus' backing vocals, providing the second show stopping number of the show.

The one thing that lets this production down somewhat is the sound. Cues need to be sharpened so the beginning of songs aren't missed and mics aren't left on backstage, and the levels in the all-important Detroit-Masterson betting scene need to be fixed so the dialogue can be properly heard above the missionary song. Adding this refinement would add some final polish to what is already a fantastic show.

There isn't a lot to say in summing up, other than: see this show. To those who are already fans: see this show. To those that haven't had the pleasure of an introduction to it: see this show. And to anyone in between: see this show! See. This. Show.

Now let's shoot crap!