

Review: 'Allo 'Allo by The Stage Club

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I have a confession to make. I have not watched the popular comedy series despite having heard of it before. As such, when I was asked by my editors to review this show, I leapt at the chance to rectify this depravity. What unfolded is a mad-cap night filled with much hilarity. Set in a French Cafe, owned by Rene Artois during WWII, the comedy is premised on Rene trying to run his cafe business, maintain his love affairs with Mimi and Yvette and pleasing both the Germans and the Resistance at the same time lest he be dragged out and shot. As with anyone trying to juggle too many things at one time, complications are bound to happen and therein lies a mine of comedy gold.

The script is such a gem. Every other line induces a belly ache as the audience cannot help but roar with laughter. The intelligent writing leaves a myriad of possibilities to play around with that could be overwhelming for any director. However, Sarah Mitchell certainly hits the right notes for this one. For a production that requires a lot of ensemble work, chemistry and timing, all the actors pulled their weight and everything was anchored down by the lead, Hunter Wood (Rene). Wood was nothing short of brilliant in this production. His consistent accent, energy and quick reactions to various situations that his character is thrown with are admirable. His role is certainly well contrasted with Jane Grafton playing Edith, Rene's pitiful wife, who is in need of a little love from her husband. Her silliness, schemes and daring to sing so badly certainly helped to feed Rene's exasperation. But aside from all the jokes levelled at her from her husband, she remains a very likeable character thanks to the wonderful acting chops of Grafton. Towards the end of the show, with the appearances of several Hitlers, Grafton definitely wins the best Hitler impersonation award.

Maya Tozzi (Yvette) and Varshini (Mimi) were great as character foils of each other. The naive Yvette and dynamite Mimi were portrayed well and I like that the contrast in personalities between both of them fit well together. William Laws (Roger Leclerc), despite having so few lines, does not fail to get his share of the spotlight as his delivery of "It is I, Leclerc!" is incredibly memorable and I found myself just waiting for that line whenever he appears. Laws also wins the best Hitler lookalike award. Other memorable lines would definitely be Foofie Gunawardena's (Michelle of the Resistance) "I shall disappear like a phantom in zee night!" and Joshua Tan's (Officer Crabtree) faux French-accented malapropisms. Barry Woolhead (Col. Kurt von Strohm) and Arnaud Sobrero (Capt. Alberto Bertorelli) brought lots of laughs with the former's wiglet-wearing, hair-conscious vanity and the latter's flirtatious narcissism. The bizarre Gestapo relationship played by Oliver Black (Herr Otto Flick) and Angela Barolsky (Private Geerhart) also brought their share of laughter. Extra kudos go to Barolsky for daring to strip to her Nazi themed undies which made the row of tertiary students beside me gasp in embarrassment. Finally the performances of

Akilesh Dewakar (Lt. Hubert Gruber) and Nick Perry (Gen. von Schmelling) were notable with the former's endearing advances to Rene and the latter's strong presence whenever he appears.

Despite enjoying myself a great deal, there were some minor notes that were off-key. Some of the routines could be performed with a wee bit more exaggeration and energy. As I was sitting in the last row, I notice that those behind were not rolling around in raucous laughter as compared to those in the front. Also, certain scenes could have been quicker in pace such as the cafe scene when the Germans demand that their sausages be returned to them. It seems as if Rene had quite a lot of time to think of ways to occupy them while finding a way to procure the sausages. It would have been to great comic effect if Colonel Strohm and Otto Flick were constantly yelling for their sausages to a desperate and completely lost Rene. Another minor bone to pick would be the inconsistent accents of Varshini and Dewakar with the former occasionally dropping the French accent while a very mild British inflection seems to creep into the latter's German accent once in a while. But these notes are more of a manifestation of my pedantic nature and they did not mar my overall enjoyment of the show.

The Stage Club's 'Allo 'Allo is certainly a must-see if you are looking for a fun night out with friends and family. As for me, it is off to the library to borrow the DVD of the original series.