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PRODUCTION	<i>Guys and Dolls</i>
COMPANY	Basingstoke Amateur Theatrical Society
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Sit down, you're in for a treat Guys and Dolls - the very mention of the show is enough to conjure up happy images from the silver screen.

Vivian Blain singing *A person can develop a cold* in Adelaide's Lament, stubby Kaye as Nicely-Nicely Johnson singing *Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat*, Frank Sinatra as Nathan Detroit, outsinging Marlon Brando as Sky Masterson. It wasn't hard to do that - Marlon Brando really wasn't known for his singing abilities.

And that was just the film. Guys and Dolls was originally a Broadway musical and has been revived many times on Broadway, in the West End, the National Theatre and elsewhere (with more songs than the film). It's a delightful musical with a large cast which makes it especially suitable for amateur theatre companies, especially those that where the term amateur refers mainly to the fact that the cast and crew are not paid. I am thinking in particular here, of the excellent Basingstoke Amateur Theatrical Society (BATS) whose production of Guys and Dolls is currently showing at The Haymarket Theatre in Basingstoke.

It is a production to draw the crowds in, something that is important in these economically interesting times, and it is also a production to brighten winter days. Ultimately it is a production to recommend.

The plot is as daft as that of any musical. It involves the unlikely pairing of the 1950s New York gambling community and the Save-A-Soul mission. Nathan Detroit needs \$1,000 to put on a crap game, he bets Sky Masterson \$1,000 that he can't take Captain Sarah Brown from the Save-A-Soul mission to Havana the next night, and the result is a lot of colourful singing and dancing, comedy and two people falling in love. Added to this is Nathan's attempts at avoiding Adelaide's attempts to marry him. She wins.

Guys and Dolls is both a great show for amateurs to stage, and a difficult one, for it has been done by so many great names in the past and therefore comparisons are bound to be drawn. Fortunately BATS has done a good job here. They have thrown themselves into it with a mix of enthusiasm, enjoyment and hard work which, has paid off.

The show opens with a scene which must have been complex to choreograph but which sets the tone for the show - plenty of people, plenty of colour, comedy, slick dancing and robust, tuneful singing. The men were particularly strong singers, occasionally drowning out the women who, on the opening night at least, took a little while to grow in confidence. Larger-than-life characters emerge Harry the Horse (with a neigh which grated horribly), Lieutenant Brannigan, Benny Southstreet (who was uncommonly like Benny the Ball from Top Cat), Nicely-Nicely Johnson (there was a cat in Top Cat called Fancy-Fancy, might they perhaps be related? I think we should be told), and Nathan Detroit. Then along comes Sky Masterson.

While all the cast are important, there are four central characters: Nathan and Miss Adelaide, Sky and Sarah Brown. They are where the love interest and the main challenges lie. They are wonderful roles and the four who played these roles stepped up to the mark. Theresa Lunn was a pure and clear Sarah Brown and had particular fun in the Havana scene where she looked like a tipsy member of the Women's Institute. Her voice was a little too light opera to be entirely satisfying for this part but she was still enjoyable.

Stephen Westwood as Sky Masterson did not have quite the presence of, say, Marlon Brando, but my did he have a much better voice. The chemistry also sparked between him and Theresa. Liz Ilett was a poignant, sweet, funny, sassy Miss Adelaide - just as she should have been and Martin Webb as Nathan Detroit was a loveable rogue with a great sense of humour and excellent timing. For me he was the star of the show, though David Scanlan as Nicely-Nicely was also shining extra bright in the firmament when he sang Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat.

It took a while for the cast to get the pace right and there were a few long pauses while scenes were changed, but I saw this on the opening night where there can still be a few uncertainties.

Overall it was an energetic, fun, slick performance with a set and costumes which could rival professional productions, and an orchestra which deserved the hearty applause it received.

Stella Wiseman