

THE BOYFRIEND

Michael Gray's Arts Blog

Sandy Wilson's sure-fire hit show [now a sprightly sixty years old] was a clever choice for this young group. The catchy twenties pastiche, and the style opportunities it offers, help to carry a less experienced cast through Cathy Court's inventive production.

The setting is simple but superbly done – an imposing flight of steps and a huge marine vista through French windows – and gives useful levels for the chorus work. Relatively easy to convert to the beach [lovely lamp-posts] and the café terrasse [polychrome stars – though gilt café chairs would be more authentic than the stackable seats we see].

The pace never flags; the choreography is ambitious and entertaining. No two numbers are alike – the witty, energetic title number, the Charleston, the Riviera, and some charming duets, they all have their special touches. I love the way the arms are used to make interesting shapes – something between semaphore and calligraphy. Occasionally a little more knowingness, slightly more sending-up, an arch aside or two, would help sustain the mock-musical-comedy mood.

The pit band [MD Robert Miles] produces an entertainingly authentic sound, and there are some very promising voices among the supporting characters, all given a chance to shine in the ensembles.

Some of these bright young things are very young indeed – closer to starting school than Finishing School – and aren't gendarmes getting younger ...

No surprise that the older, character parts present the biggest challenges: excellent work from James Simpson as the millionaire who once had a youthful fling with Mme Dubonnet [a strikingly chic Charlotte Watling] and Michael Watling makes the most of his Never Too Old number.

Hortense, the maid, is played with panache and a nice French accent by Sarah Williams, though she can hardly admonish her young ladies if she's wearing such a provocative frock.

Madcap Maisie is Rosie Goddard, excellent in the Act I Charleston, ably partnered by Ed Tunningley's Bobby. Pierrette Polly Browne is charmingly sung by Rachel Goddard, touchingly vulnerable just before she is reunited with Mark Ellis as her Pierrot, who's perfectly in period with his clipped tones, and dances with flair in I Could Be Happy With You and A Room In Bloomsbury.