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The cast of Summer Holiday

Review: Summer Holiday

By A F Harrold
Masquerade Theatre Company presented "Summer Holiday" at the Hexagon - adapted for the stage from the famous 1963 Cliff Richard Film of the same name - featuring songs from the film and that famous red double-decker

bus.

A remarkably entertaining piece of nonsense. For anyone who never saw the film the plot of the show is tenuous at best: four London Transport mechanics are allowed by the firm to take a red double-decker Routemaster bus to France because otherwise they'd have to go to Clacton for their summer holiday; they then pick up three young English women from an obscure French roadside where they've broken down on their way to Athens, by car; a fourth young woman joins the gang by hiding away on the bus while everyone's out at a local bar one evening, after she's run away from her bossy mother who's intent on making her a starlet presumably on the French cabaret circuit.

But in a marvelous strand of Shakespearean transvestitism she disguises herself as a fourteen year old boy for no discernable reason and gets away with it until dancing so vigorously in the Act One finale her hat comes off and everyone sees she's a girl. Then once the numbers are equalized everyone falls in love and all sorts of madcap adventures ensue until they arrive in Athens and the boys receive a telegram from London Transport offering them funding for something or other and people get married to one another and everyone dances into a frenzy until the curtain comes down. None of it makes a dreadful lot of sense.

Fortunately all along the way there are plenty of rather catchy tunes, played by a very superb ensemble, to distract you from the story, and although the vocals are often a little muddled through the PA there are clearly some strong singers, especially among the women in the cast. And there are some very impressive dancers among the ensemble which make you want to watch what's going on around the edges of the stage as much as watching the leads do their things.

The set - almost a full Routemaster on stage, sort of - is inventive and imaginative and flexible and the use of a real bicycle with a string of onions to tell us when we arrive in France was an enlightened touch.

The bulk of the comic acting (the 'kids' are really only there to sing) falls on the shoulders of Sam Rodgers, playing the dominatrix mother, and David Williams playing her cringing sidekick. She does a very good job at the screeching American matron and is very effective in the scene where she speaks to the Ambassador to Switzerland on the telephone, alternating between a husky sex kitten voice with him and her standard painful Elaine Stritch style caterwaul. Williams is at his best when his character (who is some sort of theatrical agent, but one wonders what else he does for this woman) is downtrodden and beaten, as he is for much of the show.

All in all it was a rather enjoyable night out - a super band, a great ensemble and some smashing songs.

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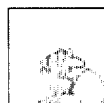
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