

Raise your voice for a heavenly hit.

Cabaret singer sees murder, joins witness protection programme, goes undercover as a nun and ends up leading a choir of tone deaf sisters. Sound familiar? Well this hit musical is based on the 1992 Whoopi Goldberg film but that's where the similarities end. If you're expecting the music featured in the Hollywood comedy then you're in for a surprise but not a disappointment. An original score that boasts some laugh out loud lyrics and impossibly upbeat melodies provides a heavenly evening of entertainment.

Just as Monsignor O'Hara, (Keith Butcher) finds the singing nuns a surprise hit, Good Companions have stumbled across surprise success with a sell out show that's difficult to fault.

There's something intrinsically funny about dancing nuns and the ensemble of sisters make light work of the complex harmonies and precision choreography. Their collective energy and sense of fun are the backbone of the show. Standout performances come from Louise Curd as acerbic Sister Mary Lazarus, Emma Woodyet as the delightfully kooky Sister Mary Patrick and Helen Perry as the wide-eyed novice Sister Mary Robert.

Excellent comedy turns come thick and fast including Ben Jones as hapless Sweaty Eddie and Phil Stanley, the epitome of 70s cool who is menacing, (but perhaps not menacing enough) as Deloris' gangster boyfriend Curtis. The trio of hopeless henchmen TJ, Joey and Pablo (Joe Millward, Cameron Trail and Rob Chilton) strut their stuff and work the audience well. Praise indeed must go to Mother Superior (the divine Yvonne Taylor) for her stoical attempts to keep her convent under control as she battles with what God's work on earth should be. But without doubt the show belongs to Dionne Reid whose portrayal of gorgeous, yet garish Deloris Van Cartier is a big reason to rejoice. She hardly leaves the stage all night and grows in confidence as she works her way through the high octane numbers with great charm and outstanding comical panache winning our hearts along the way. She really is 'fabulous baby'

There were some slight issues with sound and particularly diction in places meaning some of the wonderfully witty dialogue was a little lost but this can easily be forgiven with 10 Hail Marys and a bit of projection from the cast. The orchestra, set and costumes are first rate, good enough even for the Pope himself, whose arrival in the finale was the icing on the cake.

This saintly show sends the feel good factor through the cloisters and obviously has 'mass' appeal, let's hope Good Companions make a 'habit' of selling out and if anyone lucky enough to have a ticket comes out saying they weren't uplifted, I'm having 'nun' of it!

Bless you all!

Caroline Reader