



## ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: [Exeter Musical Society](#)

Name of Production: [CAROUSEL](#)

Venue: [Northcott Theatre, Exeter](#)

Date: [Monday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2024](#)

Adjudicator: [Caroline Whitehead](#)

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### **Delightful entertainment from a talented cast**

Carousel is one of my favourite musicals. It's also one of the favourites of this amazing musical duo of Rogers and Hammerstein and has some of the most memorable songs within it's tragic storyline. The story packs a lot in – the fairground, the clambake, abusive relationships, burglary, suicide and the afterlife. And yet we have an abiding sympathy for Billy Bigelow and the challenges he faces in life and in death.

Sometimes when I have seen this show before, I have felt the show running a bit too long (and I have seen the ballet section in Act II cut or shortened) but the pace you maintained was good and it didn't drag at all. You have a cast with some real talent and I felt that everyone was prepared for their first night and completely committed to doing their best. I see that you had double cast the children and I had the pleasure of watching Team Sardine, who did a really great job throughout the show and latterly as the Snow children. The standard of singing was really impressive, both from soloists and from the ensemble as a whole.

I was delighted that you had a full house for your first night and I hope that the rest of your week goes as well as the initial show.

## Staging

I liked the set and use of the carousel horses worked well. It's worth hiring these. And the tree silhouettes worked well too. I appreciated the gobos cast on stage and the changing mood of the back cyc.

Your scene changes were really slick and kept the pace moving throughout the show, with props being brought in efficiently. So, a good team effort for everyone back stage.

This was clearly a well rehearsed production and showed a strong connection between the director and choreographer – and I felt that you had enjoyed putting all that together. There were moments when the choreography really enhanced the drama. A case in point was the entry of Louise from the auditorium and that whole dream sequence. There were other moments, often when the whole company were on stage, that the choreography looked a bit too blocked and static. However, this didn't take away from the impact of the show and you created some lovely tableaux. The first scene in Act II (A Real Nice Clambake) and the final scene of the graduation were both really nicely designed. A slight disappointment for me was the actual suicide scene, which got rather slow and stilted. Perhaps Billy's stabbing was a bit rushed and the aftermath a bit awkward. That might improve as you get the hang of this scene later in the week. The scene was saved by Julie's despair and the ultimate song of the show by Nettie 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. Perhaps there needed to be a longer pause, or a change of lighting, for the entry of the Heavenly Friend.

Lighting was well designed and gave us the changes of mood that we needed as the story escalated and the dramatic moments intensified. There were some really dramatic lighting states that were cued precisely and with feeling for the action on stage, although the Carousel scene at the beginning suddenly got too bright for an evening fair.

The use of smoke was good for the most part and I totally understand that you needed it for supporting those downlights at the back. However, I have a bit of a fixation with smoke machines being used too much and in inappropriate scenes. I think you had it pumping out Stage Right for the whole show. For example, I don't think you needed it at Nettie Fowler's Spa when she was singing in broad daylight about 'June is Busting Out All Over'! But that low smoke you created 'Up There' with the Starkeeper was very effective.

The follow spots were a little shaky and, for someone like me who is tuned into lighting, they were distracting. Follow spot moments should go almost unnoticed (a good result for follow spots!). The downlights were effective and I was impressed with the lighting design overall, with a propensity for pink tinges of varying intensity. I also liked that contrasting lighting state in Act II with the moonlit backdrop and the stars.

Sound was pretty strong overall, although I really don't like the overuse of reverb. These voices are strong in their own right and don't need it. Once or twice there were some mic issues, where we lost the beginning of some vocal intros which was a shame, but I am hopeful that you will have addressed these operator delays as the week unfolded.

The band was strong and really settled down as the show developed. You have the benefit of a very experienced MD and he had control of the sound you were making to support your performers on stage. Sometimes when we longed for a slight slower pace with a few pauses, I felt that the band was galloping. I was first aware of it when 'If I Loved You' started and I longed for a slightly pulled back pace, but it did settle down. And the start of Billy's Soliloquy, 'My Boy Bill' felt a bit rushed, but later on when he considered the possibility of his child being a girl the pace became much more relaxed and fitted the lyrics.

Costumes were spot on and I enjoyed all the hard work that you had put into those. They were well designed and all performers looked comfortable in them, which helped to establish the setting of the piece.

### **Julie**

I could immediately tell that you were an experienced performer and confident on stage. Your write up tells me that you have performed in a number of roles. What was outstanding for me was your voice projection. Both your spoken words and sung vocals were strong and well supported. Julie is a feisty character to even approach Billy in those opening scenes and I liked that in your interpretation. Your singing was bright and those top phrases were achieved with ease. The highlight for me was your despair of finding Billy dying from his self-inflicted wound. This was a really well played moment and you could have heard a pin drop. It was the perfect prelude to the big song of the show by Nettie. I really enjoyed your performance and I hope you continue to thrive for the rest of the run.

### **Billy**

This character has lots of flaws and we all still mourn his demise. He is a troubled soul who finds his way of coping is to appear arrogant and to lash out when he finds himself out of control. I thought at the start, you might have been a bit warmer and more charismatic. After all, Julie falls for you pretty quickly. And then you could have turned up the arrogance and fast-paced delivery as your marriage started to show signs of strain and you were drawn into the risky plans of Jigger. There were a few times when your lines felt a bit rushed and clipped and we missed some of the words.

That said, when you opened your mouth to sing I forgave you all of that. You have a really lyrical voice and that will ensure that you have a long career in musical theatre if you want it. I see that the things you have done to date have well prepared you for performing on stage and that ease of delivery was evident. The conflict you feel in 'If I Loved You' was a little underplayed, but musically it was delightful.

Your longing for a child was nicely played and that Soliloquy was a really excellent piece of theatre. It's a long song and you are on stage alone for the entire scene. And I liked the reluctance you showed when the knife was hidden in your shirt and you knew that the burglary and likely murder were on the cards. Perhaps the suicide was a bit rushed and many in the audience might not have understood what was happening, but overall this was a memorable performance and I really enjoyed your Billy. In fact, in the after life, you had some really good moments, in particular with Louise and at the end with Julie, and these were intimate and touching.

### **Carrie**

As soon as I read your bio I could see that you are a consummate performer with lots of experience under your belt, so it was no surprise that you were confident on stage, with all your movements and your vocals. You have a strong speaking voice and that Southern US drawl was perfectly placed. Your singing voice was bright and totally in tune, with great breath control and perfect diction. 'You're a Queer One' was an excellent demonstration of your talent and, so early in the show, really set the bar high for all other vocalists. And 'When I Marry Mr. Snow' was a really accomplished number.

I believed in your relationships – with Julie, with Enoch and with Jigger. In fact, it's your character that is central to a lot of the comedy in the story and this is an important relief from the serious issues unfolding. Your comic timing was perfect and the audience laughed at all the right moments. Well done for having nine children and still looking so good!

### **Enoch**

Enoch is a lovely character to play and I could see that you were enjoying him. He is very set in his ways and doesn't respond well to change or challenges to his dreams. But he is likeable and provides some important light relief to the drama in the Julie/Billy relationship. Your obvious affection for Carrie had integrity and we felt your pain when Jigger threatened to undo that. Your singing voice was strong and made a nice contrast to Billy's lighter tone of voice. I could hear every word and the pride with which you introduced your nine children was charming. Your duet with Carrie 'When the Children are Asleep' had some balance issues; just try and listen to each other and get that mixed tone absolutely right. I feel confident that this will resolve itself as the run develops.

### **Nettie**

I've played this role and, as a mature woman, I think this a dream of a role. You get two of the best songs in the show and once 'June is Busting Out All Over' starts up I think the show really gets going. I absolutely loved the warmth and richness of your vocal tone – what a gift that is – and your delivery was pitch perfect. I knew that 'You'll Never Walk Alone' was going to be brilliant even before you opened your mouth. Your confident portrayal of this cameo role really supported the story as it unfolded and I could tell that you were thoroughly enjoying yourself. Even in the ensemble numbers (like Clambake) I could hear the tone of your voice rising above the other voices and the combined sound was all the better for it.

### **Jigger**

I liked the combination of dark menace and joyul humour that you brought to this role. You are clearly leading Billy astray and have no regard for his marriage. Neither have you any regard for the innocence of Carrie. And even your loyalty for your friend Billy has no substance as you run from the scene of the attempted burglary. That said, your interpretation of Jigger was entertaining and endearing for all of those shortcomings.

### **Louise**

The only thing we get to know about you it through your dance and so this is a hugh job. I loved your entrance through the auditorium and you captured the whole spectrum of this young girl's emotions - her dreams, her frustrations and her insecurities. I really liked what you did with this role, albeit a short one. You had some mic issues which was a shame but I am sure this will be resolved.

### **Mrs Mullin**

A great costume and hair updo made this character memorable and I liked your movements across the stage. Your affection for Billy is misplaced of course, and your selfish possessiveness of him makes your character unappealing, but we did see some real emotion from you when you find Billy dead. This is an important role to set the scene for Billy's life choices and I enjoyed your delivery. Some excellent diction and gestures that centred this character for the purposes of the story.

**Starkeeper/Dr. Seldon**

What a lovely deep voice you have, so perfect for the starkeeper up the ladder and later for the speech you give at the graduation. I enjoyed the strong resonance of your tone and the good projection out to the auditorium. We were all glad that Billy had someone on his side, even in death and this warmth makes the final scene hopeful and not tragic. Just what Rogers and Hammerstein would have wanted.

**Company**

You all have very strong voices and the combined sound was a really excellent quality. Even the men's chorus 'Blow High, Blow Low' was strong and resonant. And I always watch to see if there are any hangers-on in a big chorus but I saw none at all. Everyone on stage was engaged, whether they were part of the action or not. This makes such a difference to the overall impact of the show and I commend you all for that. I hope you enjoy all the show week brings. And I hope Team Herring are as good as Team Sardine!

CJW

09.04.24