

SUMMER HOLIDAY

Cheltenham Operatic and Dramatic Society
The Playhouse Theatre, Cheltenham
Saturday 22nd January 2011

All aboard for this jolly 60s romp, an appetising slice of nostalgia that will foster comforting images of sunny getaways on these cold, dark winter nights. Fed up with the English rain, Don and his fellow mechanics head for the Med, bumping into the glitzy and giggly Do-Re-Mi girls en route, before picking up runaway celebrity Barbara, with all the inevitable consequences.

There are no passengers on this trip, however. Every one of the animated, 18-strong cast contributes mightily to the vacation cause, right down to the wimpish Greek ferry steward and the inept border guards, and it's all driven headlong by capable anchorman Steven Bennett in the role of Don.

Michael Sheldrick as Steve again displays his remarkable talent for playing off-beat geeks, and Ria Westhead shines as the sweet and companionable Barbara. Her touching duets with Don border on the spine-tingling. Chasing after her rebel daughter, Jo Chisholm adds considerable clout as Barbara's headstrong mother Stella, whilst Colin Cooper is hilarious as her hapless, henpecked husband Jerry. Meanwhile, a toast to Chris Hannant as Cyril who delivers the best speech of the entire show, and whose outrageous Hawaiian shirt is so loud, it makes those worn by Milton Jones look positively mute.

The band under Dave Whittle provides stable accompaniment to the legendary Cliff Richard songs, with segues comprising some of The Shadows' greatest hits, including Foot Tapper. Very apt – I defy you not to, and you'll find it equally hard to stop gazing at Michael Barwick's impressive, life-size reconstruction of that iconic London bus.

A few first night glitches, some occasionally flat singing and a variable sound balance were amply redeemed by Toni Coles' well-crafted choreography and the many spirited, harmonious ensembles, in particular Bachelor Boy, In The Country, Do You Wanna Dance? and Living Doll, featuring an inflatable one (honestly) that generated plenty of chuckles.

Journey's end is the immortal title song capping a warm, witty and highly enjoyable production. Let the CODS take you for a ride; this tour is worth every penny. I say "Yeah!"

Simon Lewis