

## Review

### Chase Me Up Farndale Avenue, s'il vous plaît!

By David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jnr

Produced by Andrea Varnavides

Production: March 2010

This was the best "Farndale" I have seen; it used every single piece of this farcical genre it was possible to include. The properties and stage crews (Alison Munro, Keri Wilkins, Brian Marston, John Mitton, Michael Payne), and wardrobe mistress Barbara Siddall must have been taxed to the limit to keep even a semblance of organisation of what should be where and who was wearing what. The audience was tasked also to remember (amongst other things) that there was a dividing wall in the centre of the stage, completely invisible of course, which was reduced (in the imagination of one of the characters) to 2 feet in height allowing Minnie to stride over it, rather than walk through a door which had a handle on the wrong side (it opened at the hinge side), past a bathroom door hung upside down halfway up the wall, and into a noisy corridor!! Are you following this? Do keep up, if you can! This then was what this wonderful cast and crew had to keep in mind in order to present us with a scintillating, fast moving, seamless farce which was worthy of any London stage.

I wished I could have gone a second time, or made a recording of it, so that I could catch up and re-live all those absolutely comic moments, usually a micro-second of facial expression or body language. Such moments as the interaction between Fifi, the maid, (Sarah Little) and the vacuum cleaner (how do inanimate objects suddenly become personalities?), or the split second realisation between Minnie (Kim Tomlin) – her shoulders tensed and a silent scream of NOoo! shuddering through her – as her script was torn in two for the umpteenth time. The timing between audience realisation and the actual happening on stage was hysterical. How can a person start a movement, halt it and let the audience realise that they have not got a single idea of what is going to happen and carry that audience with them, all without saying a word? This cast could and did with superb ease. We all know it is not ease, but talent and hard team work. The producer, Andrea Varnavides, is to be congratulated on her masterful production and brilliant cast; I expect she often wished it was a straightforward murder mystery when all she had to do was worry about not over-egging the red herrings.

Each character played at least 2 characters, some 3, in "the play within the play", plus their W.I. characters, so they were chopping and changing clothes, body language and personalities. Even clever, bossy Mrs Reece (Stella Wallace) managed to forget her pearl necklace when wearing a smart man's lounge suit worn previously, I think, by Minnie as either Parrot or Charot. *[No, actually they were different suits, Diana, but your confusion is*

*understandable!* – Ed.] – Are you still following this? When Pete Grocock as Virginia Parrot came on with the biggest brunette bouffant which threatened to topple him over ... .. well!!

About a quarter of the way through I gave up trying to follow the plot and just gave myself up to the complete enjoyment of each actor's brilliant performance. The "Marseillaise" was a superb tour de force by Thelma (Rachel Cockburn), sung with complete gusto and feeling.

Sarah Little, a new face to RoCo, was a delight to watch (she's stunning as well) as she portrayed bewilderment and forceful organising mixed with kindly concern, and costume swaps from provocative back-less short mini dress to severe Mrs Barrett and French *apache* costume with a moustache. RoCo is so lucky to have such attractive young stars.

All the way through, the cast consistently maintained an amusing French accented English when in character, that did not slip – which I thought was amazing. The fun was in the detail, which was conscientiously adhered to throughout. The audience had to be on their toes too, because there was so much to see and hear and keep up with even though they probably did not have a clue what the plot was about.

The finale at the Moulin Rouge was mind blowing. How could they all summon up the energy required to finish off with a real Can Can dance (choreography by Sheila Telfer) complete with cartwheels and Can Can dance routines? Who would have thought the St Andrew's stage could have supported it either!

Well done, everybody – I wish I could have given you all a BAFTA. And you want to mention everybody by name because they contributed to this fantastic performance!

**Diana Sutherland**