

Dolly needs a bit more dressing up

MUSICAL REVIEW*THOM DIBDIN***Hello Dolly King's Theatre *****

WHEN it comes to the big numbers and highly-choreographed songs, The Bohemians know exactly how to make their Hello Dolly fly.

Intricate set pieces are pulled off with the sort of ease and timing usually only seen on the professional stage.

No matter that they involve most of the 35-strong chorus weaving their way around limited space or wave after wave of dancers leaping from the wings - and split second appearances of the principals.

At its best, this Hello Dolly, is hugely satisfying stuff. The Bohemians have attracted some excellent principals in what is a very busy time in the Edinburgh amateur musical calendar.

Of the principals, David Steedman is splendidly pompous as Horace Vandergelder the tightfisted, "half-millionaire" feed-store owner in Yonkers, New York, in need of a second wife.

His search has led him to use the services of Dolly Levi, a meddling matchmaker divorcee with a dreadfully over-the-top dress sense - played by Fiona Main with an equally outrageous New York accent.

Vandergelder's downtrodden duo of shop workers, Ian McInnes as Cornelius Hackl the chief clerk and Richard Brownlie-Marshall as his assistant Barnaby, are a breath of fresh air. McInnes has the best lines and tunes. He uses them well to create a brilliantly comic and consistent character - and 17-year-old Brownlie-Marshall is a talent to watch for in the future.

The duo's comic timing first sets the stage alight when they steal a day off and go up to New York City. Seeing Vandergelder in the street, they have to hide in Mrs Irene Molloy's milliners shop.

Their coy flattery of Beverley Nicolson's impeccably judged and well-sung Irene and the excellent Claire Robertson as her assistant, Minnie, is exactly right. But what really works well is the style with which they pull off the hoary old hiding-in-the-cupboard routine when Vandergelder comes in to propose to Irene.

Thanks to meddling Dolly, Irene and Minnie think they have found a pair of rich men-about-town. And the impoverished pair are blackmailed into taking their new loves to New York's swankiest restaurant for this production's really big number - The Waiters Gallop. Led by head waiter, Peter Tomassi, its intricacies are pulled off with ease.

All the in-between bits, so often the downfall of an amateur production, work a treat too. The costumes look great. and the scene changes are slickly done.

There is, however, another side to this coin. All the attention on the big numbers has left many of the other tunes short of rehearsal. The start, involving Dolly and Mark McLean as artist Ambrose Kemper who wants to marry Vandergelder's niece, is almost as excruciating as Main's accent - although the latter is at least authentic.

It's not just that Main's voice lacks power, although she has plenty of stage presence, but that the whole chorus seem to be relying on the on-stage microphones to make themselves heard.

This is no opening wobble, either. After the precisely-performed moves of the Waiters Gallop, the pace falls apart for what should be the show-stopping title number. And while the timing does pick up, the whole production limps into the final curtain.

That said, the slow start and an ending which needs a bit more work do not mar the enjoyment of a production which needs just a bit more polishing to sparkle with the brightness it could.

• *Runs until Saturday*

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