

HIGH ARTS - AUGUST 07, 2008

GEORDIE - 5 August 2008

After seeing last year's SYT production of *His Dark Materials* at the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow last year I had high hopes of Geordie which were not, alas, completely fulfilled.

Based on the novel by David Walker, this musical story tells a heartwarming tale of more innocent times, before the Second World War. A 14-year old gamekeeper's son from a Perthshire Glen, tired of being picked on because of his small stature, sends off to London for a correspondence course offered by Henry Samson.

Assiduously following Samson's exercise regime, wee Geordie grows... and grows. After the death of his father, Geordie steps into his shoes and is encouraged by his employer, the benevolent and eccentric Laird, coached as a shotputter by the Reverend McNab, scouted for the British Olympics team, resists the flirtatious Swedish shotputter Helga, and against all odds wins a gold medal - in his father's Black Watch kilt.

Despite misunderstandings and the attempts of his former tormentor, Tom Gillespie, to steal her away from him, he also wins the hand of his childhood sweetheart, Jean.

There was much to praise in this production. What director Mary McCluskey doesn't know about coaxing the best out of a young, inexperienced cast could be written on the back of a matchbox.

The minimal comic book design by Finlay McClay worked well and the costumes skilfully evoked a bygone era. Carla Duggan's choreography showed off the thirty-strong ensemble's impressive dance skills and was particularly effective in the rousing second act number 'Life Can Be Just Fine'.

The young cast threw themselves into the show wholeheartedly, and their fresh enthusiasm was very engaging. Comedy is a hard act anyway, as any theatre professional will tell you, but in musical comedy, performers must sing, dance AND get the laughs.

Perhaps the best performances came from the supporting cast; Alasdair Hankinson gave a solid comic turn as the Reverend McNab, Sandy Howie as strongman Henry Samson wore his leopardskin leotard and delivered his lines with equal confidence, while both Rosie Cosgrove's portrayal of Mistress Robertson and Sarah Helena Ord as

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Geordie's mother had a professional consistency that promised well.

SYT's budget did not stretch to an orchestra so the accompaniment was provided by keyboards, most of the time switched to what sounded like the "spinet" setting. A rather weak score which might just have scraped by with the lush layers of a full orchestra sounded thin, tinny and shallow, doing little or nothing to support the somewhat fragile voices of the principal players. Had the keyboardist expended as much effort as the young performers, it might have helped.