**BUGSY MALONE**

It is a long way from the mean streets of Chicago at the time of Prohibition ninety years ago to the small stage of Herstmonceux’s village hall. But this transformation was successfully achieved by Young Herstmonceux Amateur Theatrical Society’s performance of Alan Parker’s legendary ‘Bugsy Malone’. A new professional production of the musical opens at the Lyric Hammersmith in London next month.

For director Joanna Stevens, ably assisted by producers Chris and Linda Thompson, this was her fourth Young HATS show. But with a cast of thirty-three enthusiastic 8 to 17 year-olds, a lengthy script and some less-than-well-known songs, it was no easy task. Costumes and hair styles (Sue Stewart and Rachel Coleman) accurately reflected the period, wide-brimmed fedoras for the boys, sequined flapper dresses for the girls, plus two impressively-painted vintage cars and an assortment of realistic-looking hand-guns designed to splurge the gangsters’ hapless victims. A live band (Eastbourne Theatres take note), directed with precocious ability from the keyboards by 17-year old Michael Cullen, helped enormously in creating the 1920’s atmosphere.

Oliver Stevens, in the title role of boxing promoter, Bugsy, strutted the stage, wheeling and dealing, first wooing then dumping his long-suffering girlfriend and wannabe actress, Blousey Brown (Hattie Pemberton). Her singing “I shouldn’t cry but I do!”, and their duet “I’m Feeling Fine”, were high-points. As dodgy speakeasy boss Fat Sam, Alexander Stevens was a mature mixture of bravado and humour, as was his finger-cracking accomplice Knuckles (Stuart Carlton). Sam’s vivacious chanteuse, Tallulah (Gemma Manktellow), with her posse of supporters, added glamour and colour. His gangland rival, Dandy Dan (Ben Wyllie), led his mobsters with sinister aplomb, while heavyweight boxer Leroy (Thomas Fox), and diminutive Cagey Joe (Charlie Moon), in ‘So You Wanna Be A Boxer’ pulled no punches. Ruby Thomas as the speakeasy’s cleaner, Fizzy, demonstrated her burgeoning talent singing “Tomorrow”, as did 9 year-old Lizzie Pemberton as Lena.

This was memorable musical theatre performed by effervescent and talented youngsters and a triumph of organisation by a dedicated team.

ROGER PAINE