

BOOKS FILM THEATRE RADIO

Musical

IGOT A KICK OUT OF THIS

A delightfully buoyant and exhilarating revival of Cole Porter's colourful musical comedy



Georgina Brown

ANYTHING GOES

★★★★★

Few musicals are as determinedly daft as Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*, an escapist fantasy in which lovers, criminals and celebrities travel across the Atlantic by liner in the 1930s. Even fewer are such a deluxe chocolate box of melodies, stuffed full with the cleverest, wittiest lyrics: You're The Top, I Get A Kick Out Of You, Easy To Love and It's De-Lovely, in each of which Porter provides his own fabulous one-line reviews for the piece. The man was a musical comedy genius.

Daniel Evans's blissfully buoyant revival effortlessly rides the choppy waters of corny jokes and preposterous plotting. Set on a luxury liner, Richard Kent's shipshape design of scrubbed decking also provides a bird's-eye view of the vessel up the back wall.

Moreover, choreographer Alistair David makes the show dance as it never has before. I'd forgotten, if I'd ever clocked it, that in amidst the far-fetched froth, this show makes a serious point about the changes, post-Roaring Twenties, that America had gone through, shaking off the puritan shackles of prohibition and loosening up socially, morally



Hot stuff: Alex Young as Erma

and even musically with the emergence of jazz. Porter's lyrics for the title song, *Anything Goes*, powerfully capture the progress: 'If driving fast cars you like, If low bars you like, If old hymns you like, If bare limbs you like, If Mae West you like, Or me undressed you like, Why, nobody will oppose.' And evangelist turned nightclub singer, Reno (Debbie Kurup) makes it explicit in ultra-modern, jerky, quirky movements.

Kurup is on sensational form, dancing up another storm, this time in a red sequin girdle, for *Blow, Gabriel, Blow*, a divinely spoofy gospel number in which she and her chorus of devilishly saucy angels (Chastity, Charity, Purity and Virtue) almost blow the roof off the theatre.

In another show-stopping moment, Stephen Matthews as the limp and loopy aristocrat, Lord Evelyn Oakleigh, reveals his family secret (his great-great-grandmother had stepped out with a gypsy). Stripped to baggy white boxers and vest, garters holding his socks up, he turns matador, and using his dressing gown as a cape, hilariously releases his 'dark and savage' side.

Churlish as it must sound, Matt Rawle's Billy Crocker, the stowaway stockbroker Reno has got the hots for, is less easy to love than the drop-dead de-lovely John Barrowman, unforgettable in the part in the National Theatre's production in 2002. And there's not much chemistry between any of the various lovers.

Never mind, Alex Young's luscious nymphomaniac Erma more than makes up for what's missing, leaving us in no doubt that she will be bedding the entire crew of fabulously fit sailors. Exhilarating entertainment.

◆ Until 17 January at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield: 0114-249 6000, www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk



CD OF THE WEEK

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