



beat

## IN THE MOOD

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE MELBOURNE THURSDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2016

David Bornstein

It is a mystery to me how any of the showgoers that packed out the stalls of Her Majesty's Theatre last Thursday could remain quietly seated throughout the full-length revue of 1940's toe-tappin' chart-toppers that was *In The Mood*. Led valiantly by musical director and pianist Bud Forrest, the 13-piece String Of Pearls Orchestra delivered doozy after humdinger in the slickest style, and I must confess it was a constant struggle to keep myself from getting up to dance on my seat.

A showcase of music and dance true to its period, *In The Mood* borrows from repertoires ranging from the Andrews Sisters to the Ziegfeld Follies. If there's a song you don't know you wouldn't want to admit it. Audience members are encouraged to sing along throughout, but must remain patiently seated—still, the six spectacular dancers ensure that the show is by no means lacking in terpsichorean pleasure. Particularly impressive are the elaborate swing-dancing manoeuvres executed by Paige Sabo and Jordan Ellis, where between them they seem only to have two feet (or less) planted on the stage at any given time.

*In The Mood* is big, and I was glad to be seeing it from up in the circle with a good view of the whole stage. Set and props are sparse, so even when all 19 performers are onstage there is always plenty of room to move. Alex Sanchez's stage direction and stellar choreography have the performers making full use of the available space to great effect.

Maintaining fidelity to the traditions of the dance-hall revue that many of its songs were written for, *In The Mood* makes no attempt to pacify its audience between big numbers with paltry, tepid attempts at a dramatic narrative structure, as those keeping pace with Broadway trends may recognise in many other contemporary shows. Nor does it veil lengthy costume changes with arduous vamps on pedestrian melodic motifs recycled from its 'big numbers' (indeed, it might be suggested that the show is comprised entirely of 'big numbers').

Instead, the more elaborately choreographed pieces are punctuated with delightful smatterings from the String of Pearls Orchestra, who are well up to the task of holding audience interest while striking a tasteful balance between the instrumental interludes and singalong choruses which typify the old style dancehall shows. Where Alexander Markowitz's disconnected narration has been woven in between songs, its aim does not seem to be to lull the audience into a suspension of disbelief, but rather to venture through the fourth wall and 'set the mood', placing the music which follows in context for the audience.

Perhaps when it was conceived 23 years ago *In The Mood's* target audience would still have held the vibrant wartime dancehalls and USO shows in living nostalgia. For today's audience, the show provides an insight into the way their parents, grand-parents or great-grandparents would have enjoyed the songs that have worked their way up to being timeless standards.

Irrespective of age or upbringing, a few short minutes in the audience is certainly enough to get anyone *In The Mood*.