

Anything Goes at Oxted School

by Sam Oxlade, Year 9

Sam wrote this review for his school's newspaper in Oxted, Surrey, and it was the work of a moment for Hal Cazalet to snatch it up and pass it on to Wooster Sauce. The students of Oxted performed Anything Goes for five nights, December 5–9, 2017. As Hal wrote, "It is interesting how the kids related to this 'vintage' musical, as it seems reassuring that quality never dates." Thanks to Philip Harmer for providing Sam's review plus the photos.



Once again, it was time for Oxted School to pick our annual production, and after much excited anticipation among the students, the production team of teachers finally announced it was to be *Anything Goes*. Set in the 1920s, it follows the story of Wall Street broker Billy Crocker, who stows away on the SS *American* to be near his lost love, Hope Harcourt, who is engaged to the wealthy Englishman Lord Evelyn Oakleigh. It's a story of passion, perseverance, and love, and it was a huge delight to many students. The production team had thought carefully about how to relate the historical nuances to the customs of modern life and focused their direction of the play to suit both the setting of the production and the 21st century audience. Much to the surprise of many teachers, more people showed up to the auditions than ever, and although not everyone stayed the course, everyone had fun!

There was certainly a very ecstatic cast, especially in the pair of pupils sharing the part of Evelyn Oakleigh. "I love my part!" said Alex Maynard, 17. "It's really fun working with the comedy timing – he's such a posh character!" The other Oakleigh, Joel Wall, told us that the play was "good fun, with a great cast to work with!"

Teddy Stevenson, 18, who played the principal

role three times in a row in our school productions, had now come back for his last performance. He admitted that this last show was "the best". He described his character of Billy Crocker as "obsessed with Hope, and with great lines".



In the play, Crocker has an evangelist friend who helps him out along the way. She was played by the sixth-former Sophie Green, who described her experience quite positively. "I love my character; she's so relatable!"

After recruiting such an eager cast, rehearsals began promptly. Everyone began frantically learning lines and perfecting their performances. For our teacher, Lucy Seymour, Head of the Creative Arts faculty at Oxted School, this was her third production with us. This year she had taken a slightly different approach to the casting: a split cast. This meant that all principal roles were divided between two students to perform on individual nights. "There are so many talented students," explained Mrs Seymour, "it would be a shame not to include them as much as I could in this wonderful play!"

Then, something incredible happened on opening night.

We got an email from the great-grandson of P. G. Wodehouse, Hal Cazalet. But it wasn't only a message. Hal had written us a new version of the song 'Anything Goes' and recorded himself singing it. None of us could contain our excitement! He had even included some of the names of our cast and production team, such as Teddy, Luke, and Mrs

Seymour! This inspirational song gave us huge motivation for the big performance, and none of us could wait to go out and show the audience what we had!

One of the youngest members of the main cast, Jonah Rumsey, 14, who was playing the gangster Moonface Martin, was afraid that his older partner Luke was doing a much better job than he was. As it

turned out, he was greeted by rapturous applause, and he was more encouraged than ever.





The audience adored the show; we got plenty of amazing feedback from friends and family who had come to see it. They were dazzled by the lights, the costumes, and our incredible ship-like set. And although people laughed at different jokes on different nights, everyone found comedy somewhere, even the little ones, who might not have understood some of the more adult jokes.



All in all it was a spectacular performance, and even though some students were pushed out of their comfort zones, I'm sure they'd all be tempted to give it another try. Mrs Euridge, the head teacher, described it as one of the "best opening nights I've ever seen".

So it turned out that Wodehouse's musical was a success at Oxted, which leads me to wonder: what will we be doing next year . . . ?

