

SWAG captures Cowra's heart

by Carl Erle

It's not often, if indeed a very rare occurrence, to be able to attend a world premiere season of a new Australian musical - especially in your own town. What a privilege to be in the large and enthusiastic audience last Saturday night at the Cowra Showground Pavilion for SWAG. Congratulations to everyone in the Cowra Musical & Dramatic Society. How proud we should all be that this vibrant & exciting group has existed in our town since 1963 and continues to thrive and go from strength to strength. How bold to try something new.

Firstly, let me say how funny and entertaining SWAG is. Thank you Maggie May Gordon & Michael Maurice Harvey. A new theatrical jewel has been formed! A particular delight was the melodious music score with its guitar & keyboard accompaniment by the band and the enjoyable singing to the many sweet tunes. I was particularly struck by the songs *The Road That Leads You Home*, *One Little Star*, *Men & The Swag*. This show has a truly wonderful music score. Some of the songs seemed too short to me but that's probably good thing by leaving you wanting more.

The characters are rich and fruity with lots of good humour, pathos and romance thrown in. This is indeed a good mixture for the book of a musical.

If slightly overly-long in the second act, I am sure that the author will no doubt review the dialogue after having seen the show in performance. Particularly, the final scene needs a bit of re-thinking. That said, however, what joys there were in the dialogue - particularly the banter amongst the Kendrick family at the dinner table - and during the yabby scenes with young Danny or Boy-o. Mind you, half the battle is in getting the actual delivery of the lines to the right level of expression; and the timing & energy that happen in the theatrical chemistry with the audience, to build the characterisation out of situation and the inner feelings expressed by the character. To that extent, the dialogue served most of the characters extremely well; particularly the father/son dynamic between Daniel and his young son Danny as well as that between Possum & Aunt Lettie.

I won't detail the intricacies of the plot, but suffice to say the Kendrick family and their fight to keep their property Rose Farm is central to the drama with a few swaggies and neighbours turning up to the farm to work, romance, get drunk, fight, and work hard some more and to make us laugh. We are taken to the city briefly too at the Theatre Royale - but you'll have to see the show to find out what happens there.

I went to the show with some trepidation but left with a smile on my face and a pleasant surprise at this show that had so much heart. Let's hope that when the show is over and done it has a long and prosperous continued life beyond the town of Cowra. Well done.

Thanks to the Cowra M&D for all your hard work, and for entertaining us yet again with a brand new theatrical gem. I eagerly look forward to the next show.