

Top Hat

Act 1

Thursday @ 2.30pm on May 7th 2015

Good afternoon Ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for this stage production of the Irving Berlin musical Top Hat directed and adapted for the stage by Matthew White and Howard Jacques. The musical director is Jae Alexander leading an 11 piece orchestra.

The 47 week tour will continue on to Southampton, Dublin, Bromley, Sunderland, Woking and Eastbourne.

My name is Pauline , your describer for Act 1 which will run for 1 hour followed by an interval of 20 minutes, during which ,my colleague, Pam will be giving you her programme notes and then describing Act 2.

Synopsis

Set in 1935, initially in New York, then in London and finally in Venice, we experience the emotions of Jerry Travers, a famous hooper about to star in his first West End show and Dale Tremont, dress model on her way to Venice, and their story within this elaborate musical comedy. It is based on mistaken identity and its complications. Jerry falls helplessly in love with Dale and Alberto Beddini, an Italian dress designer, attempts to thwart Jerry at every turn. Horace Hardwick is the hen pecked West End producer with a manservant, Bates who provides a lot of visual comedy and may prove to be more important to Jerry's cause than he is given credit for.

Characters and costumes

There are 6 main characters admirably supported by an ensemble of 23.

Jerry Travers is the long, lean, smooth haired, suave and sophisticated American dressed in a smart beige double breasted suit and two tone shoes with button down collar and tie or with a white tie and tails.

Dale Tremont is a tall, blonde, beautiful self-confident American model dressed in immaculately cut calf length day dresses, or a riding habit or long elegant evening wear.

Horace Hardwick is the friendly rich British West End producer dressed in dark smart three piece suits but always with the wrong tie according to his manservant Bates.

Alberto Beddini is the small comical Italian dress designer who regards Dale as his personal property. He wears light three piece suits, and shiny shoes. His evening dress is a white DJ with cummerbund.

Bates is the typical older manservant favouring a winged collar, smart tie, tailed coat and tailored trousers. He is tall and distinguished but he is not averse to a little fun when he has to secretly follow Dale and he wears a succession of disguises.

The ensemble costumes are typical of the era; the men wear double breasted suits or tailed or untailed evening dress while the women have an air of vulnerable femininity in mid-calf length dresses and cloche hats. The evening dresses are pleated backless frocks, satin gowns or palazzo pants.

Sets

It is 1935 and the orange fringed curtain lifts to transport us to the Music Box Theatre in New York. Jerry is performing his last number before travelling to London for his first West

End show. The three fixed art Deco cream panels on either side of the set, frame a backdrop of slanted skyscrapers and the words New York, Broadway and Paramount painted over them. His chorus is 16 strong and the girls are in turquoise waistcoats, gold jackets, black tasselled skirts and grey cloche hats and spatted shoes, the men are in turquoise jackets with black and gold striped trousers and gold waistcoats with beige bowlers and spatted shoes. Jerry wears a gold coat with gold and black striped trousers and a white bowler.

Jerry then appears in his suit under a long Crombie coat, at the stage door to be interviewed by the paparazzi before he leaves for London.

We are now in London in the exclusive gentlemen's Thackeray club. The large central curved section set at the back, is the dark wood porter's desk with a selection of cubby holes behind it and the desk is flanked by two full ceiling height cream and gold columns. High above the desk is the Club emblem.

At the front of the room are three high backed armchairs with reading lamps fixed to them and a gentleman is in each silently reading their newspapers. Jerry is in the middle. Horace comes to meet Jerry and takes him to the Excelsior Hotel and so to an elaborate hotel suite.

The central curved section has become a gold and black cocktail bar and a wide cream armchair is set on either side of a circular coffee table. Beside the left hand chair is an ashtray on a stand. Two uplighter floor standards flank both of the doors on the right and left with a coat stand by the right hand door. Jerry and Horace are relaxing and we meet Bates who dispenses whiskey and takes their coats. We also meet Dale in her grey silk negligée.

Back at the entrance to the hotel, people are coming and going and this leads us into the busy lobby with its central reception desk above which is a large illuminated clock. A florist's stand is on the right, laden with flowers and a cream velvet circular sofa with a central pier is in the centre of the room. Dale and Jerry meet up again and she is on her way to a riding lesson.

Jerry persuades the hansom cab driver to let him take his place and Dale is oblivious to this change and she boards the cab which can be seen bowling past the park behind the screens. Dale eventually storms off.

There is a loud thunder and lightning storm and Dale seeks shelter in the bandstand in the Park and is joined by the insistent would be lover, Dale.

Back at the Hotel and the flowers are being transported to Dale's suite where she is changing behind a screen and a disapproving Beddini is questioning the origin of the flowers. Dale is in a blue dress with a white collar and dropped hem skirt. Beddini is in a smart grey suit with a red tie.

Back in the Hotel Lobby and the flower stall is now empty and Dale decides to stay in London because of Jerry but she is given some information which changes her mind and she leaves for Venice.

We are now in the Garrick Theatre and watch part of the West End show- a chorus of girls in silver leotards with pleated chiffon skirts attached to their waists held high to reveal their legs. The lead member enters, dressed in a similar outfit but in gold. They finish their number and they hurry to the door of Jerry's dressing room to catch a glimpse of the handsome star, before he performs the iconic song and dance routine Top Hat, White tie and Tails.

Cast

Jerry Travers Alan Burkitt

Dale Tremont Charlotte Gooch

Horace Hardwick Clive Hayward

Alberto Beddini Sebastian Torkia

Bates John Conroy

Act 2

Welcome back to act 2 of Irving Berlin's musical Top Hat. I am Pam and I will be describing Act 2 for you.

The story has now moved on from London to the Hotel Venezia at the Lido in Venice.

The Costumes

Most of the female hotel guests are dressed in calf length cotton summer dresses of the time in pastel shades, they wear court shoes with straps and sometimes large straw hats. One or two are very modern and wear ankle length wide legged trousers that look like long skirts together with short sleeved blouses. .

While most of the men wear light linen suits with panama hats or boaters a few of the men have abandoned their jackets and some even their ties.

The bathers sitting by the lido are wearing bathing costumes.

The men's in dark colours and the women's in pastel shades with discreet decoration.

The Hotel's bell boys wear black trousers with white shirts and smart dark green waistcoats with gold trimming and buttons. The waiters wear black trousers and white shirts, the senior men in white monkey jackets and the rest wearing black waistcoats and long white aprons. They all wear black bow ties. The maids wear the traditional black dresses with white frilly apron and cap.

The hotel manager, Signore George Conelli is a short man with a little moustache. He wears a dark grey suit with tailcoat.

We meet Madge, Horace's wife, for the first time in this act. She is a fairly tall, slim lady with a pleasant smiling face. She has tightly curled titian coloured hair. Madge always dresses very elegantly and when she arrives at the hotel she is wearing a fitted lilac dress with floating panels in contrasting shades. She wears strapped high heeled shoes in lilac and wears a large lilac straw hat decorated with pink ribbons on one side of her head. In the evening she will wear a slinky almost backless dark red satin evening dress with long tight sleeves. A diamond pendant will hang down her back and she will wear diamond ear rings.

Dale arrives at the hotel wearing a turquoise short sleeved top trimmed with white lace over very wide legged matching trousers. Her large white sunhat is decorated with turquoise ribbons. Her strapped shoes are white with high heels. Her curly blonde hair frames her face.

For the evening Dale wears a dark green dress designed by Bellini. The fitted bodice just has thin straps over the shoulders and is low at the back. The full skirt is made of panels of varying lengths, knee high on one side but gradually getting longer until it is ankle length at the back. It has a thigh high slit on one side but this is only obvious when she dances later.

At first she wears a short sleeved jacket in the same material over the bodice which makes it look as if it is part of the dress. Dale compliments the dress with gold high heeled sandals.

Later still at the dance Dale appears in a beautiful white satin dress, also designed by Bellini. It has a fitted bodice with thin red ribbons crossing above and around the waist. It is low at the back and over her shoulders are tiny sleeves of white ostrich feathers. The skirt is full and trimmed with longer ostrich feathers which tremble as she dances.

Dale wears diamonds in her ears and a diamond necklace.

In this act when we first see Jerry and Howard they are depicted as being in an aeroplane. They are without their jackets on the plane but when Jerry arrives at the hotel he is wearing a light brown suit with waistcoat, a white shirt and dark green tie, His shoes are two tone tan and cream. He carries a straw boater.

Horace arrives later wearing a grey suit with waistcoat over a white shirt with a dark red tie. He also wears two tone shoes in grey and white. He carries a straw hat.

Later in a scene in the Bridal suite Horace is wearing only a green dressing gown as he prepares for a shower while Jerry is ready for the evening in evening dress with black bow tie.

Throughout the second act Bates the valet appears in a variety of disguises.

As a waiter, a dowager duchess, a gondolier, and a chef.

Scenery

The opening scene and several others take place in the Hotel's open courtyard. On the right the half circle balcony of one of the rooms juts out over an alcove in which is a table and two chairs. At the back of the courtyard is a small beach in front of the lagoon with a view of the Doge's Palace in the distance. This is where the bathers sit on loungers some with parasols.

Several scenes take place in the bridal suite which Horace and Jerry end up sharing. This is a very opulent room furnished in muted colours Floor length window curtains in taupe frame the long window centre back. They are also draped above and at the sides of double bed set into a large semi-circular alcove back right. On the bed is coffee coloured satin quilt and cushions in cream satin.

A buff button back sofa and matching love seat stand either side of a low table in the middle of the room. The door to the room is front left and alongside it is a console table with a telephone on it. The door to the bathroom is front right.

We only see a corner of Madge and Dale's suite as that and the bridal suite are shown at the same time. A large screen slides in to separate them,

In Madge's suite on the left is a telephone table between two arm chairs with an occasional table to the right.

When both rooms are present lighting indicates the room involved.

Near the beginning of this act the sliders divide part way and above the courtyard appears the interior of an aeroplane. We only see two seats. Horace is sitting behind Jerry.

Two new characters appear in Act 2. Madge Hardwick, the wife of Horace played by Rebecca Thornhill and the Hotel manager George played by David McKecknie.

While the music is being played the sliders are all the way across. There is just a small round table with a chair each side. A waiter wearing an apron appears and puts a drink and a napkin on the table then leaves. Then the sliders part fully to reveal an afternoon tea dance in the courtyard. Some hotel guests are dancing, others stroll in fanning themselves. Beyond the courtyard are the bathers who after a little while will join the dancers.