



[Crazy For You](#)

at Opera House, Manchester

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) November 2017

This was the opening night of a 5 night run of The Watermill Theatre's production of the Gerschwin classic, ***Crazy For You***.

I was really looking forward to seeing this show; I adore Gerschwin, but so rarely does one get the opportunity to watch an entire evening of one of his Broadway classics. The songs will pop up now and then in showcases and gala evenings, but more modern style Musicals have taken over from the all-singing, all-dancing, boy-meets-girl and all ends happily-ever-after formula that this show glorifies and typifies.

In a nutshell, Bobby, the wealthy son of a banking corporation is desperate to escape the world of finance and make it as a showman, and so backstage of the famous Zangler Theatre he does an impromptu audition for the great Bela Zangler himself, but fails to impress. The leading dancer of his famous 'Follies', a certain Tess is the object of Zangler's attention, but she only rebuffs him by asking how his wife is. Meanwhile, Bobby is in a quandary of his own being placed between having to marry his over-bearing and upper-class fiancée of 5 years whom he clearly doesn't love, or go to a one-horse town in Nevada to foreclose on a theatre building owned by the bank. He chooses the latter, ends up in Deadrock, sees the girl of his dreams, falls hopelessly and madly in love, and the rest, as they say, is history.

This Musical should have been wonderful, glorious and should have had everyone dancing along and whooping all the way. Sadly it didn't. There are a few reasons I think why this failed to engage the audience the way it should have done.

First, the set. designed by Diego Pitarch simply didn't work. The idea that a composite one-set-fits-all with the smallest token gesture of a New York main street backcloth v a Nevada Desert backcloth was very lame and failed to impress. A false proscenium arch with boxes had been constructed across the stage with a couple of additions here and there, and this was meant to represent not only the two completely separate theatres in the show, but also untold other locations too including exterior scenes in the town of Deadrock (a clever name for the town, a mix of Deadwood and Little Rock).

Second, and to my absolute pet hate. Actor-musicians when there is no scripted need for them. If a character is meant to play an instrument then they should play it, absolutely. However, when the characters are meant to be singing, dancing and acting, especially in a Musical such as this... to see Follies girls with brass and wind instruments in their hands as they dance, and to

see cowboys playing trombones and xylophones whilst acting is just wrong on every level. This does in no way diminish the talents of the cast, please don't think that, it is simply not their fault; but they should not have been required to do this. We need an orchestra in the pit and the performers on stage. The only exception I will make for this show is for Moose to play the bass, and for him and the two other cowboys to perhaps play banjos or similar for their song Biding My Time. However, I have seen excellent productions of this musical where neither of those things happen, and the bass is mimed.

Third, and this is perhaps the clincher. This is a song and dance Musical which requires, let's cut to the chase, fantastic singing and dancing. We are in the 1930s, the era of big dance Musicals and where spectacle in this art form was the order of the day. We even have a character on stage called Bela Zangler (a Mickey Take of the real life Florenz Ziegfeld), so why then was I underwhelmed by the choreography? I am not saying the dancing was poor, it wasn't at all, what was presented was presented well and was good, it simply didn't match my expectation of spectacle.

In the leading role of Bobby Child was the very enigmatic and likeable **Tom Chambers**. Looking and sounding like a cross between Robert Vaughn and Jerry Orbach, I really enjoyed his all-round song and dance man performance. I accept of course that characters in Musicals such as these are at best 2-dimensional, but somehow Chambers brought a realness to this role which I could empathise and identify with.

Polly Baker, the object of Bobby's affection, was played here with great style by **Charlotte Wakefield**. Her Annie Oakley-esque nature crumbling away little by little until she falls completely under the romantic spell of Bobby / Zangler / Bobby. A powerful voice matched her powerful performance, and a wholly enjoyable performance it was too.

Surrounding, aiding and complementing these two were an array of talented actors and actresses playing supporting parts. **Neil Ditt** played Bela Zangler, the Broadway producer. A great character actor and very believable. His 'mirror image' scene in the saloon with Bobby was excellent. My only real niggle here is that Zangler was supposed to be Hungarian, and yet Ditt played him with a mock German accent!

With a couple of special mentions to the smaller roles of Everett Baker (**Mark Sangster**) and Lank Hawkins (**Christopher Fry**), this was an entertaining and toe-tapping start to the festive season.