



[Dreamboats and Petticoats](#)
at [Palace Theatre, Manchester](#)

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) February 2017

I have to admit from the off I did go and see this show with a certain amount of uncertainty or maybe even trepidation. However, after having watched the Musical, I can say that the story and performing were much stronger and more entertaining than I had imagined they'd be. I actually found myself being swept away by it all, and it was, by and large, a hugely enjoyable experience.

First of all though we should disregard the absolutely awful set (**Sean Cavanagh**) which basically consisted of several flats of brightly coloured, dizzyingly busy adverts and record sleeves of the era, whilst several smaller set items were brought in and out from the wings which wobbled and moved all over the place. It all looked cheap and tacky and was very distracting from the actual show and performers.

The only other thing which didn't quite gel with me - yes, let's get all the negatives out of the way at once - was the costuming. The programme distinctly dates this show as the early 1960s, however the costumes on display this evening were very much from the 1950s. Greasers, Teddy Boys, Rock N Roll Skirts etc. There may well have been a crossover and these styles and fashions still popular in the early 1960s, I don't know, I wasn't born then; but I feel sure that teenagers of any generation would have been wearing the fashion of the moment, just as they do today.

Ok, now to the performers and performances which were all utterly flawless. With a banal storyline which had been manufactured in order to shoe-horn as many period songs into the show as possible, the narrative obviously concerns teenage love and took second place. As I mentioned previously, this was much better realised than I had imagined, and I actually did start to empathise and emote with the two protagonists; so full credit must be given for their real interpretations of the roles. These were **Alistair Higgins** as Bobby - what a beautifully clear and controlled singing voice he has - and **EI**

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as Laura. Both were very natural and believable, and truly brought their story and the zeitgeist of the time to life.

Helping them along the way, were two other love stories. **Alastair Hill** as Norman and **Laura Darton**

as Sue, made a lovely contrast to the protagonists, stronger and more edgy and also gave us a touch of the comedy in the show. There wasn't much, a little gentle humour here and there, which perhaps could have been exploited a little more, although the slapstick style stuff with

Mike Lloyd

's caretaker role did seem somewhat out of place.

David Luke

and

Gracie Johnson

as Ray and Donna were the third couple, almost a subplot of a subplot really, but they worked well together and Luke made an excellent older brother for Laura

A strong ensemble, with three Shadows-esque guitarists amongst others helped to fill the stage and soundscape. However, **Jimmy Johnston** as Phil brought the era, atmosphere, and setting very much into focus. His mannerisms, voice, and general demeanour all typifying, for me at least, the way things were back then - a stage version of Reg Varney in *The Rag Trade*. His singing and dancing also impressed.

I have never been a fan of named cast members playing instruments. Sadly this trend is becoming more prevalent as budgets get cut and producers require more and more from their performers. It NEVER works, and moreover it never will. Watching the lead actor suddenly pick up a saxophone and start to play a riff in the middle of a romantic song for example is just ridiculous! The music should always be played by the band - unless of course the character is a musician in the script, like Laura here is a pianist so she plays the piano; no problem with that at all. In this particular show, this anomaly didn't bother me as much as it has in other shows. The instances when this happened were less frequent I guess, and the fluidity of the show, with the band being on stage and part of the action made it more believable. Mind you, that still doesn't mean I like it!

In conclusion then I would simply state that if you are going to this show (with a rather confusing title unless you know the song to which this refers, as there isn't a boat in the show at all, but there are plenty of petticoats) to reminisce and enjoy the music, then you are in for one hell of a night as they manage to plough through some 45 songs, and the energy, talent and commitment to the show from all the performers is undeniably electric; you simply can't help tapping your feet and bopping along with them.