

Fingers crossed for the future of CODS production 'Powder and Paint'

CODS, Credition Operatic and Dramatic Society certainly thrilled audiences when it staged the world premiere of a musical which chronicles the life of Helena Rubinstein through 2,000 of her letters and telegrams.

Performances of *Powder and Paint* at Queen Elizabeth's Academy Lower School hall were sold out on each occasion and rightly so.

The story of how Rubinstein built an empire making women beautiful was a compelling one.

She developed a world-wide beauty cosmetics business which dominated America, Australia, the United Kingdom and much of Europe. She established the business in 1899 after she borrowed £250 from a friend to set up her salon.

She was a millionairess by 1907 and, in 1928, sold the American side of her business for £7.5 million to the bankers, the Lehman Brothers. She bought it back two years later and in 1973 the whole company was sold to Colgate for \$125 million.

It was subsequently bought by L'Oreal in 1988, where it has remained as a highly successful international brand.

James Bulmer, from Chawleigh, originally wrote a film treatment but then, when he decided to turn the Rubinstein story into a musical, he brought together a team to work on lyrics and music.

Retired Brigadier, Ant Stevens, wrote the lyrics and the book of the musical, based on the film treatment. He was also director of the show.

The majority of the music for *Powder and Paint* was composed by retired military Major General, Mike Heath.

The inspiration for *Powder*

and *Paint* came when the producer, Mr Bulmer "inherited" from his mother, a box full of correspondence between Helena and the manageress of her Mayfair salon, Rosa Bird.

Powder and Paint documents not only Helena's own personal life - full of colour and emotion - but also the world around her, from just before the First World War to the time of the Great Depression.

The story-line was told through the songs, performed by a cast of 24, ranging in age from 13 to 60-plus and they did Credition proud.

A show with many songs and a large volume of dialogue, in addition to many scene changes, the show featured many changes of mood, laughter to sadness and intrigue.

The colourful mix of songs ranged from pastiche rag time to jazz and from Noel Coward to Cole Porter.

The show was an emotional journey and if, as predicted, the show itself could soon embark on its own sensational journey.

Among those watching the performances were some top names in the show business world and it is hoped that the show will be picked up and taken to the West End, perhaps Broadway, or even be turned into a film.

One of the guests was Jilly Greed of Stage Entertainment Touring Productions, who is the director of *Holiday on Ice* and marketing and public relations company, One Voice Media and PR.

London-based Show producer, Julian Stoneman, a former member of CODS, of Julian Stoneman Associates also attended.

He has been the producer/

manager of such shows as *Mamma Mia!*, *Jersey Boys*, *Rock of Ages*, *Finding Neverland*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Great Expectations* and the *Laurence Olivier Awards*.

He said he was "delighted" to have been able to attend and said he was impressed that the actors had given 110 per cent and spoke of their outstanding commitment in producing the show.

He said, following the performance: "Last night's production indicated to me that CODS have upped the ante with other organisations in the South West, and the whole of Credition should be proud of what this company does to promote the town and itself.

"As an old member myself it is great to see that in 2012 the company is still going strong, and working on new diverse productions, which is the way things will have to go to maintain an interest to bring in new young members.

"We mustn't forget there is a great catalogue of old material out there which needs to be performed as there is an audience for these, too."

Mr Bulmer said: "I have been absolutely knocked out by the talent, energy and determination of the cast and the CODS committee to make the world premiere of *Powder and Paint* a roaring success.

"So where do we go since the curtain came down on Saturday evening? Hopefully the invited producers from London and provincial theatres will have discovered the potential for a new musical...so with the blessing of the angels we will open one day on a big stage.

"We have started a journey for wherever it has to go."

Alan Quick



Elizabeth Arden, played by Cathy Lamb, centre left and Helena Rubinstein (Cathie Poole) did not see eye-to-eye in this scene at a Vogue magazine party. Photo: Mike Palmer.



The young Helena Rubinstein, right, was played by Sheena Galpin, here in a scene with her schoolfriends. Photo: Mike Palmer.