

THEATRE REVIEW

Once Upon A Time At The Adelphi

★★★★☆

A great musical is a joy to behold. It takes a determinedly miserable person not to enjoy Oklahoma!, Calamity Jane or Chicago; they're all glitz, glamour, breaking into song over breakfast, larger than life and in glorious Technicolor.

You can tell Phil Willmott, the creator of *Once Upon A Time At The Adelphi*, relishes the joie de vivre of the genre. Some of it is replicated here, in this tale of star-crossed lovers set in Liverpool's iconic Adelphi Hotel from the 1930s to the present day. It has glitz, glamour, good song-and-dance routines, a dashing handsome hero (Thompson, played by Simon Bailey, pictured) and a sweet heroine (Alice). What it doesn't have is enough consistency to make it a great musical.



The good parts includes blowsy Scouser Babs, as well as some truly rousing set pieces involving dustbin lids and invisible typewriters. There are some nice comic turns and the set and costumes are first-rate; it really does capture the sense of excitement that was in the air in Liverpool in the 1930s, when Hollywood came to town.

It's not all great, though. Alice's 'they-bombed-our-chippies' speech during the Blitz, the overblown sentimentality, the misplaced political subplot and the unsurprising twist at the end let it down.

It's silly, frivolous fun, like all good musicals, but people won't be tapping their toes to this show in 50 years' time.

Debbie Johnson

Until Aug 2, Liverpool Playhouse, Williamson Square, Liverpool, Mon to Sat 7.30pm, mats Jul 17 1.30pm and Jul 19 2pm, £9 to £22, concs available. Tel: 0151 709 4776. www.everymanplayhouse.com