



# THEATRE WORLD INTERNET MAGAZINE

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## ***Once Upon A Time At The Adelphi*** **A new musical by Phil Willmott**

Liverpool is having its 15 minutes of fame – well a Year of Culture to be more precise and Writer/Director Phil Willmott has taken the City's most iconic hotel, its history and romance, stirred them around on a stage, thrown in some sparkly song and dance routines and come up with a fabulous new musical fairy tale for the year 2008. There is always a danger of local references falling flat and at first I was somewhat wary of a rather parochial approach, but the story was the story of most successful musicals – on-off romance, comic second leads, foot-tapping, feel-good tunes and a brilliant ensemble from the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) all of which developed into a thoroughly enjoyable evening. Set both in the 1930/40 era when Hollywood stars and millionaires came to stay at the Adelphi and the present time, the play covers the stories of two parallel romances. The stage set is a cleverly contrived revolving façade which changes from lounge to rooftop to bedchamber to kitchen to foyer, as if by magic. Film stars are coming and going as they await their ocean liner which will take them to America. A true incident is recalled most comically when Roy Rogers and Trigger came to stay at the hotel and made an appearance on the balcony, to cheering crowds. Young Alice and Jo are played by Julie Atherton, who delivers her songs and her lines with warmth and vivacity. Older Alice and Mo Thompson are also believable and moving. Every member of the cast apart from the male lead, Thompson, (Simon Bailey,) plays at least one other role so that at the end of the play I was genuinely surprised to see that there were only fifteen cast members, the multiple roles and costume changes having worked so smoothly. Helen Carter did a very funny comic turn as Babs, a stars-in-her-eyes waitress and a Hollywood tycoon's wife and her main song, "A Wedding and a Yacht" equalled any I have heard in a musical.

A real breath of fresh air was the involvement of LIPA students, a genuine pool of talent and a chance for them to turn professional at least for a few weeks. Their routines were simply dazzling and their exuberant energy shone through. Hats off, too, to the musical team. It was refreshing to hear the new music and whilst some of the numbers were blended to the period there was a modernity about the whole show which left everyone in the audience with smiles on their faces.

**ONCE UPON A TIME AT THE ADELPHI** is at the Liverpool Playhouse  
from 28 June until 19 July.

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**.....Wendy Fairbank....(Theatreworld Reviewer)**