



Baby Louise*	Megan Bignall
Pop/Cigar	Paul Boyle
Louise	Nikki Cross
Herbie	John Fenner
Agnes	Hannah Fordham
Miss Webber/Phil	Elaine Freeborn
Electra	Billy Grant
June	Vanessa Gravestock
Tessie Tura	Hali Keenan
Baby June**	Charlotte Knights
Mazepa	Lucy Maxwell
Tulsa	Luke Montgomery
Baby Louise**	Harmony Renny
Angie	Sarah Reynolds
Yonkers/Pastie	James Seymour-Grant
Miss Cratchitt	Laura Simmons
Uncle Jocko	Tim Willis
Rose	Rayner Wilson
Baby Jane**	Beth Woolley
L.A.	Nathan Woolley
Chowise	Daisy, Lola and Jack

Company

Rosie Aspinall-Smith, Lian Bates, Lauren Bignall, Elle Churchill, Beckie Clark, Beth Crossley, Harriet Gathell, Oscar George**, Hannah Gelles, Darcy Harrison, Lily Holmes*, Rosie Jeffs*, Bethan King, Esther Manning, Ed Murdoch, Izzy Owen-Ward, Poppy Renny**, Becca Shaw, Henry Whitehurst

* - performing on 6, 9, 12, 14, 15
 ** - performing on 7, 8, 11, 13, 16

REVIEW: Gypsy is a hugely entertaining and deeply compelling treat on Leamington stage

Nick Le Mesurier reviews Gypsy at the Loft Theatre, Leamington. Take an ambitious mother who projects her frustrations onto her two daughters, determined to make one of them a star. Take those daughters and give the younger one a hidden, unexpected talent. Let the older one, June (Vanessa Gravestock), depart suddenly leaving the younger, Louise (Nikki Cross) to fill her place and her mother's fanatical ambitions. Then at the last moment, when they are down to their last nickel, let Louise discover a hidden, entirely unexpected talent for striptease in one of the sleaziest burlesque joints in town. Then let that beautiful butterfly emerge as the most famous of her kind in the world, and you have, well: Gypsy Rose Lee.

It's a terrific rags-to-riches story, with all sorts of complex psychological motives going on behind the makeup and the smile. At its heart of course is not Gypsy, but her mother Rose (Rayner Wilson). Ferocious and tender, loving and hating, driven by her own powerful sense of rejection and yet ultimately rejected, she is an archetypal figure, both tragic and grand, magnificent and awful, a shining light and a dark place from which people naturally run.

Gypsy is a musical of many contrasts, and is hugely entertaining as well as compelling drama. There are some great songs, of course, and good dancing, and this production balances the humour nicely with the sadness. I could spend the whole review listing the talent, but John Fenner as the agent Herbie deserves special mention for his long-suffering lugubrious love for Rose. The big cast is on form, as you'd expect under Tim Willis's direction. It's a grand Christmas treat, and not to be missed.

REVIEW - Gypsy, Leamington Loft Theatre

A STAR is born. She bounces on to the stage, performs cartwheels, does the splits, and sings and dances like a seasoned professional.

Little Charlotte Knights plays the precocious Baby June in the much-acclaimed showbusiness musical – and commands the theatre in this terrific opening section. She'll be sharing the part with Beth Woolley for the show's run, both hopefully winning hearts as Leamington's answer to Shirley Temple.

It's a great start but, strangely, there's a long way to go before the production hits top gear again. That only really comes when the grown-up June's sister Louise somewhat ironically becomes the one to hit the heights, in another riveting performance by Nikki Claire Cross.

Louise's success, as the stripper and showbiz phenomenon Gypsy Rose Lee, is superbly realised when this accomplished all-rounder delivers the transformation from dowdy second-stringer to star with style and vivacity and a splendidly vampish quality. At such moments, Tim Willis's production brilliantly transcends the supposed limitations of local theatre.

For the rest, things could improve with the run. There's a strong hint of this in Rayner Wilson's portrayal of the central momma figure Rose only striking true form in the last impassioned ten minutes of the show. Until then, this Rose is not the dominating force required to drive through the theme of unstoppable theatrical mother ruling the roost and destroying the good things around her.

This is a lavish and difficult show to produce in the best of circumstances and there are certainly the benefits here of a fine orchestra directed by James Suckling and lively dancing by a large team of spirited youngsters who are effectively put through their paces by choreographer Francesca Smith.

A striking debut by Vanessa Gravestock as the teenage June and some well-observed character work by John Fenner as Rose's partner and agent provide other good moments, but it's to be hoped the production will quickly develop a more cohesive pattern.

Peter McGarry



