**9 Arch Claregalway Musical Society,**

**“ANNIE” Town Hall Theatre, Galway,**

**November 23, 2013.**

A SOCIETY is always onto a winner when it gets a live audience on its side. Never mind what the critics say, what adjudicators with lofty ideals write or those end of season awards. If you can please the paying public that’s the biggest prize of all. Such a moment arrived early during this fast-paced Peter Kennedy production at Galway’s Town Hall Theatre when I was serenaded in quad by several budding Annies around me as Sarah McGuire launched into “Tomorrow”. Eleven-year-old Sarah may look young for her age but she turned in a mature performance as the Depression-age foundling who gets a happy ending that had the adults in the stalls captivated as well.

**Mr Kennedy’s production**, played out in front of a set with backdrops and flats of almost photographic quality, was also blessed with a raft of other quality leading players who maintained plausible American accents all evening.

**Amanda Stuart** was excellent as Miss Hannigan, a clever measured portrait of the harridan in charge of a city orphanage, so weary of a world that has left her in charge of little girls that she seeks solace in the bottom of a bottle and barrelling around the stage on a pair of bow legs berating anyone foolish enough to listen.

**Louis Brennan,** in a convincing bald wig which completely changed his appearance, brought his lyrical voice and some sharp suits to the role of Oliver Warbucks, a man so powerful he can effect the removal of crime buster Elliot Ness from his pursuit of Al Capone to engage in the search for Annie’s long-lost parents.

**Roisin Egenton’s** commanding Grace Farrell was a fashion plate with a classy singing voice although her hairstyle was too modern.

**Nicky Lawless** was lively as Hannigan’s brother, Rooster, a man in a suit so vivid it could have lit up the Christmas market in nearby Eyre Square while Tara Spelman as his broad, the splendidly named Lily St Regis, is an excellent dancer.

**Debutant Donal Gill** as Bert Healy looked as if he had been on stage all his life, Karl O’Doherty was a forceful President Roosevelt while Adrian Mooney was highly impressive as Drake the butler.

With Mr Kennedy’s trademark choreography pushing the action on the very lively kids’ chorus as the residents of the city orphanage and the adult ensemble had their work cut out for them.

**Musical director Shane Farrell,** who had clearly note-bashed the kids’ chorus, also produced a good sound from the adult chorus despite the imbalance between the sexes. His small but punchy band also never threatened to overwhelm the singers thanks to the help of a first-rate sound plot from Fintan Higgins.

**Annette and Feargal Cavanagh’s** costume plot didn’t just concentrate on the principals but turned out an ensemble as a sharply dressed set of New Yorkers with the guys in double breasted suits and their women in coats with velvet facing cloche hats and then turned them into a smartly turned out set of servants at Warbucks’ mansion.However, the look of the down-at-heel residents of Hooverville was less uniform and, in some cases jarringly modern.

**David Lane and Tara Killilea’s** treasure hunt for what seemed like a ton of props must have been started several months before the curtain went up yielding big ticket lots such as a laundry basket and a couple of real gems in an old valve radio and telephone.

Behind the scenes, stage manager Chontelle Kenny and her team ensured the action on stage zipped along all evening with scenes flowing into each other seamlessly.

**John Grayden**