

LAUGHTER IN THE RAIN (tour Bromley)

With a whole host of juke-box style shows flying out the window, here comes the latest from producer Bill Kenwright. *Laughter in The Rain* is a non-stop tribute to the songs and the life of 1950s heartthrob Neil Sedaka.

I was apprehensive over what to expect at the first night as I was familiar with Sedaka's hits but wondered how they could be turned into a musical. My apprehensions were answered with a smooth, fast-moving tale of Sedaka's life performed by a company of ten fine versatile performers and an onstage band. I was amazed how many songs Sedaka had actually performed as well as written, including songs for Connie Francis, Tony Christie, and Elton John.

Sedaka is played brilliantly by ITV's *Grease Is the Word* runner -up Wayne Smith. Sedaka started his life sharing a two-bedroom flat in New York with his family and three aunts. He was encouraged by his mother – played with chutzpah by Julia Farino – to learn the piano with a concert career in mind. But rock'n'roll arrived and the teenage Sedaka started dishing out the hits that were soon to become legendary songs, such as "Oh Carol", "Calendar Girl" and "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do".

The life itself is an interesting tale of rags to riches accompanied here by no set but a cinemascope-style screen showing film footage and photographs from the period to lend authenticity and occasional poignancy. The clarity of staging lets the music shine through. Standout performances come from Smith as Sedaka, providing great vocals but also a loveable warmth with the cheekiest smile in showbiz to match. I also enjoyed Anna Clayton's performance of Sedaka's love interest and future wife Leba; the duet "The Hungry Years" brought the house down.

All in all this was an energetic slick production and for all fans of Sedaka an infectiously good-natured opportunity which will have you tapping your feet, clapping your hands, and standing up with rapturous applause. For all the newcomers there is enough sunny optimism and fun in the show to make the chilliest of nights feel like a sunny day.

- by Simon Gross