



Society : Stage One Youth
Production : Les Miserables (School Edition)
Date : 24th September 2010
Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidenhead
Report by : Steve Bold, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

Right from the start, this was a captivating and engrossing production. The entire show was inspiring and emotional, full of outstanding performances from the chorus and ensemble through to the principals. I have long been a fan of Les Miserables having seen a number of professional productions, but this was the first time I have seen an amateur production. It was a production of life and enthralling actor. I can only offer my full congratulations to the cast and crew, as I understand, virtually all of whom were nineteen years of age or younger. Myself and others in my party were all full of praise for a significant production from some outstanding actors with exciting futures ahead of them.

Dominic Andersen, Jean Valjean

A particularly mature and consistent performance, showing complete understanding and sympathy with the character. Excellent vocals and acting ability, Dominic 'aged' without making a caricature of the process and 'lived' through a very emotional experience. He ruled the stage with his voice and presence a commanding performance.

Jared Barkia, Javert

A perfect foil for Valjean with good stage presence and vocals. Excellent interpretation of the complexity of the character and showed us both sides of the character. Ferocity in the way he followed his duty turning to despair as he came to conclusion he had been wrong all those years.

Laura Phillips, Fantine

Pure, clear vocals and impressive spirit came through in your performance. A powerful and soulful rendition of 'I dreamed a dream', which I would say could have been toned down slightly to represent Fantine's more fragile exterior, but Laura came to the fore with her powerful death scene.

Michael Smith & Cat Roberts, Monsieur & Madame Thenardier

These two characters are often thought of as just the comic relief, but there is so much more depth and Michael and Cat brought every nuance and subtlety to the stage. The both produced wonderful characterisations and comic timing bringing these two horrendous pastiches to life. They played well off each other, but each worked well individually relishing their opportunity. But I must make special mention of Cat as a marvelous young actress with an excellent future ahead of her.

Ronni Quinby, Eponine

Emotional but tinged with an underlying sadness in her delivery, with superb vocals (a very spirited 'On My Own') Ronni conveyed the hopelessness of unrequited love and gave real pathos to the character. The 'A Little Fall of Rain' duet was understated but powerful to such a degree that I could feel the emotion in the auditorium.

Harry Morgan, Enjolras

Sincere and spirited, Harry's performance was believable and powerful, leading the people through their revolution to a tragic end, but he gave them the belief with his delivery and fervor. A confident and powerful singing voice.

Daniel Embleton, Marius

Although I thought Daniel started off a little starstruck under the lights, he grew in confidence and stature. He showed his range and confidence through a sterling piece of emotive singing with 'Empty Chairs and Empty Tables'. A complex changing character that Daniel captured, with good vocals and stage presence.

Lorna Young, Cossette

A compelling performance, with genuine emotion and excellent vocals. A delightful voice with an expressive face and controlled but enticing movements about the stage. She developed excellent relationships showing her versatility with both Valjean and Marius.

Kiera Ashe, Young Cossette

Excellent performance from this young actress in a production that must have been quite overawing in such a significant role. Clearly nervous, but Kiera was excellent in her delivery with soft subtle voice that carried throughout the auditorium.

Kyle Watson, Gavroche

A very spirited and charismatic portrayal that was a joy to watch as he filled the stage with his personality.

Ben Hynard, Bishop

Downplayed, understated with just the right amount of conviction and forgiveness in his demeanour.

Ensemble - Josie White, Zac Abbott, Tom Kemp, Amelia Wall, Kirstie Bradbrooke-Armit, Alex Brown, Ellie Bullen, Gareth Cary, Nick Davie, Becca Eden, Phoebe Gast, Elaine Gray, Laura Gray, Rosie Harris, Bryony Hollands, Keren Hollands, Harry MacGregor, Sam MacGregor, Ella Whittaker

All these young actors gave their all in their roles, giving us a real sense of comradeship and commitment to their cause. Excellent vocals and acting ability from each and every one.

An exceptional chorus throughout that had obviously worked long and hard on their individual characters and the set pieces. 'At The End Of The Day' and 'Lovely Ladies' being particularly dramatic and accomplished numbers, though all their appearances were animated and convincing.

Maggie Kearney, Peter Rumble, Lorraine Barrett and Crew, Staging

Having only seen this production performed on a moving stage, I was intrigued as to how it would be staged by Stage One Youth. The barricade itself was a superb piece of design and engineering which was maneuvered seemingly effortlessly by a highly accomplished stage crew and used with confidence by the cast. Only once did it have a little hitch, which was quickly sorted and I must give high praise to the hapless revolutionary, who hung suspended upside down, until the problem was sorted! A very clever transformation to the bridge for Javert's suicide. The scene changes flowed quickly and quietly, with the characters setting much themselves and the stage crew in costume, so the illusion wasn't shattered, as happens in many productions. The inset scenery was all of a very

high standard, giving us just enough of an idea as to where the action was taking place. There seemed to be little problem in getting the entire chorus off, everyone knowing their place in the movement and the queue. But be careful of billowing black curtains on entrances and exits as people push them to one side.

Brian Cox, Andy Nicholson, Charlie Fox, Lighting and Sound

This aspect of the show was exceptional. Such a difficult balance between the atmospheric requirements that are demanded by this dark story and enough lighting to allow the audience to see everything as it happens. Beautiful use of colour (particularly the red/white/blue lighting behind the barricade) throughout, and wonderful use of spots and effects. The only small glitch (and I really am nit picking here!), was that Monsieur and Madame Thenardier weren't particularly well lit in their wonderful 'Master Of The House'. They were quite well back on stage and this may have had something to do with it, but the lighting didn't always quite catch them. Generally though, it was obvious that a huge amount of thought and artistic talent had been employed in the lighting schedule. Sound was very well balanced and cues were spot on time, particularly the gunfire etc.

Graham Barker, Musical Director

The wonderful score was played expertly and sympathetically by a very accomplished orchestra, led extremely well by Graham Barker. 'Les Miserables' has a notoriously difficult score and in some parts, quite significantly sounds like an opera, so for a youth group, must have been a huge challenge. Absolutely everyone rose to that challenge and I have great admiration for everyone concerned, knowing how much commitment and rehearsal this show must have taken. To pick out highlights would be to list the whole show, so I won't do that. I will say though that all the soloists and ensembles put their hearts and souls into the music, showing immense understanding of their roles and the actual storyline of the piece. For such a young group, this was an outstanding achievement that deserves the highest commendation.

Choreography

From 'Lovely Ladies', through the superb use of the barricades, the delightful 'Wedding Chorale' to the iconic march in 'Do You Hear', every detail of movement and dance had been planned and executed with precision and artistry. The fights were believable and there was excellent business being conducted throughout, behind the main action. Good use of freezes, which were generally well held. Imaginative grouping of all the characters and chorus gave ever changing interest and atmosphere. The show moved at a great pace and was never allowed to slacken, which added to the tensions and dramas as they unfolded, and gave the poignant moments much more impact and meaning. Superb!

Costumes

Costumes had been well resourced and were entirely in keeping with the period and the characters. The Thenardiers were wonderful and all the costumes added to the characters and the atmosphere of the show, with the cast appearing confident and comfortable in them. Uniforms and suits etc, were excellent. As with all shows nothing is ever completely perfect, so I must make mention of two wigs. Firstly, Fantine's first long blonde wig seemed a little too Rapunzel-esque. It didn't convey the downtrodden nature of her life and looked overly brushed and bouffed up. The second wig belongs to Madame Thenardier, a garish red number, that she almost lost in one particular song, but Cat did well to hold onto it and make it part of her character.

Properties

A huge task for this show, but again, everything had been well resourced and gave authenticity and realism to the show, with the cast using the properties confidently.

Ursula Embleton, Director

It was difficult to realise that all the actors in this memorable production were so young, as it was a particularly mature and compelling production. The teamwork was obvious and the understanding of the complex characters and storyline was most impressive. The spontaneous standing ovation from the entire audience as the curtain went down was well justified and I am sure that I was not the only one to leave the theatre, feeling really choked with emotion! Ursula along with the senior members of the production crew, has obviously pulled the full measure out of her cast, working them hard to produce an outstanding and fully rounded emotional production. I cannot express enough the enjoyment and appreciation I felt for this show.

A superb production which will live in my memory for a long time. Thank you so much for inviting me and for the wonderful hospitality of the Front Of House staff. Well done to everyone involved from the Box Office staff to the Lighting Technicians to the Cast to the Crew! Brilliant!