

National Operatic & Dramatic Association

London Region



Society : Stage One Youth
Production : **FAME, THE MUSICAL**
Date : 14th September 2013
Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidenhead
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, District 14

Report

Fame, The musical, a musical premiered in 1988, is based on the successful 1980 film and a six series TV programme. With music by Steven Margoshes, lyrics by Jacques Levy and book by Jose Fernandez; it follows the fortunes of students at New York's High School of Performing Arts.

I confess that I am at an age that I do remember the TV series that ran from 1982 to 1987 and followed the weekly exploits of Bruno, Doris, Leroy and company. Each week it exposed the lives, hopes and fears of the students, giving us an insight to the characters of the school.

The problem of using this as a 2 hour musical, is that the characters are diluted, to a point that their trials and tribulations are too quickly resolved or glossed over completely. I have seen this show several times and have always been disappointed about the depth of characterisation.

Stage One Youth are an exceptionally talented group of young performers, and for this production the ages span from 14 to 21 years old. Their energy and enthusiasm was magnificent.

Overall, this production could not be faulted – the characters were clearly defined, very well delivered; superb singing and excellently rehearsed dancing, slick scene changes and crisp direction – all made for an entertaining and enjoyable performance.

GRACE WILLIS (Miss Sherman)

Grace has a wonderfully good strong voice, displayed admirably in the songs "*THE TEACHERS ARGUMENT*" and "*THESE ARE MY CHILDREN*". Her character, as a strict no nonsense old-fashioned teacher was very well defined, but also, so was her tender side where you could see that really cares for her students. It was lovely to see how well Grace

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used her eyes to portray her expressions. I felt that *"THESE ARE MY CHILDREN"* was wonderfully acted and I really felt the emotion from her wonderful, clear singing voice.

KIRSTIE BRADBROOK-ARMIT (Ms Bell)

Kirstie gave a believable performance of the dance teacher- her perfect posture was clearly that of a trained dancer. I was impressed with her singing and acting throughout the song *"THE TEACHERS ARGUMENT"*. The balance of vocals with GRACE was very impressive. One small note for the director as I felt the focus was taken during solo owing to movement from the other character on stage.

ZAC ABBOTT (Myers)

The drama teacher was intelligently played by Zac, understanding the demands of the character. I liked the way that the sleeves were rolled up to the elbows, a common practice during this period. Zac's voice was excellent – a good range to his speaking.

PATRICK ASHE (Mr Sheinkopf)

I was very impressed how this young performer produced such a clear characterization of the East European teacher. The whitening of the hair and makeup helped to age his appearance, but Patrick's voice and mannerisms were perfect for the eccentric music teacher. Well done.

CAMERON ROJOW (Nick)

Good, strong opening in Act 2 with *"I WANT TO MAKE MAGIC"*. Cameron showed good vocal range on his singing and portrayed a strong overall performance. He portrayed good reactions during the song *"LETS PLAY A LOVE SCENE"*. Well done.

AMELIA WALL (Serena)

Serena starts of very shy and timid but by the end of the three years we see a far more confident and accomplished individual. I felt that Amelia captured the development of this characters journey perfectly, displaying bashful characteristics in her early scenes but producing a far more out-going persona in the latter scenes. I thought the song *"LET'S PLAY A LOVE SCENE"* was acted superbly throughout. Amelia beautifully sung *"THINK OF MERYL STREEP"*. Her American accent was impeccably maintained throughout. A very accomplished performance, well done!

NIVEN WILLETT (Joe)

Niven performed the role of the class comic very well. This was a nice sustained characterization. His performance of *"CAN'T KEEP IT DOWN"* was superbly performed, showing good movement and excellent interaction with the rest of the cast.

COURTNEY FLEMING (Tyrone)

As the part of the talented by dyslexic dancer Tyrone, Courtney produced a credible performance. His singing and line delivery was very well presented. His general movement around stage looked comfortable and easy. During the song, "*DANCIN ON THE SIDEWALK*", Courtney produced some excellent back flips (although I did find the movement of the chairs coming on slightly distracting). I felt that his love/hate relationship was presented with a good understanding. Well done.

LUCY MARSHALL (Carmen)

This is a difficult part to play – mainly because there is not enough within the script to help the actress. However, I felt Lucy managed to extract every bit of Carmen's obsession with fame. I loved the comic timing in the delivery of her line "You're hot, you're not." Lucy's singing, especially in "*THERE SHE GOES*" was very good indeed. I would have liked to have seen a more gradual deterioration in the representation of her character, perhaps with a slightly disheveled look in each of the scenes before a last appearance. However, Lucy's performance in her last scene was excellently acted.

GEORGIA CASEY (Iris)

Georgia produced a solid and consistent performance throughout. Like many of the cast, she had a clear understanding of what her character was about and confidently delivered. I was particularly impressed with her movement to let Tyrone's speech sink in. This was superbly handled, understanding what the scene needed perfectly. Well done.

TORRIE MARTIN (Mabel)

This character part could so easily be overacted, particularly on the dance lesson but Torrie appreciated the character and where she fits in within the scene, ensuring that the laughs were delivered without upstaging others within the scene. Torries' vocals in "*MABEL'S PRAYER*" demonstrated that she has an excellent singing voice.

BEN COOPER (Schlomo)

Ben played the quiet shy Schlomo very well. The song "*BRING HOME TOMORROW*" produced a good start. Ben's reactions throughout were very good indeed. His feelings for Carmen were well displayed, offering the audience enough to understand his feelings but without Carmen being aware.

BETH CAWTE (Grace 'Lambchops' Lamb)

The part of "lambchops" is a lovely little character part which was very well performed by Beth. She has lovely facial expressions that she made to good effect. A nice part and well played.

ENSEMBLE

Stage One Youth understand the value of the ensemble, and that everyone on stage needs to have their own unique character. A good example of this was the various reactions to Joe, some liking it, some shocked, some being totally un-interested. This is a superbly disciplined and talented group that maintained an incredible energy level throughout. Straight from the opening scene, the show began with a good, strong opening in "*HARD WORK*" with good energetic dance and good enthusiasm. I enjoyed the performance of "*CAN'T KEEP IT DOWN*" that displayed some interesting dance sequences on the chairs.

I liked the dance and movement for the three disciplines and then in a circle – good eye contact to back – with everyone producing very good clear diction. What typifies this group is their dedication to perform. After the show I happen to meet BETHAN DALEY who fractured her arm but continued to perform the run, complete with all the energetic dances. She only missed one dance because it involved too much clapping. My sincere admiration goes to BETHAN but also to the entire group, as this emphasises the mantra "the show must go on". Well done indeed!

Stage Manager/Props (MAGGIE KEARNEY)

The stage looked very well managed with good quick scene changes which were aided with the cast bringing on/off stage properties.

Set

Excellent set that allowed space for the action. Had split levels that added interest to some of the scenes. It looked very well constructed. I liked the idea of showing all three muses as painted on the backdrop that immediately set the location for the show.

Properties

Overall the properties suited the period the show was set (1980s) and location (New York), for example, the chairs looked appropriate to those one would find in a school/college (I am sure they are the same ones I sat on at college!) I am not sure about the "bluff yourself in" book as this was more 1990s rather than 1980s.

Sound (BRIAN COX, EMILY MARTIN)

The sound was very well balanced with good mix of live sound from the musicians and the mic'd singers.

Lighting (ANDY NICHOLSON, MAC, BRADLEY COX, NOA MESHOUAM)

Once again Andy's lighting design was imaginative, interesting without being intrusive to the action. I like the small details – like the windows on the back being lit. There was a creative range of colours used on the back (including pink, purple, cyan, orange). There were lovely

effects for beginning of act 2 with spots and dry ice. The spots and purple of effects for dance for I WANT TO MAKE MAGIC (reprise) was very effective. The busy set of cues were very well executed and in particular, there was good cue pick up and reaction to slap by Sherman and good quick LXF for the "*I made it*" cue.

Wardrobe and Costumes (ISABELLE FOLEY, JEAN GULRAJANI)

The range of costumes was excellent and Isabelle and Jean should be congratulated for their efforts. I loved the costumes for festival, red shirts, black ties and waistcoats for the boys with compatible colours for the girls. There were some moments of inspired inspiration for example the wonderful use of the skirts as matadors cape, then were reversed and used as skirts again, showing a different colour. All the cast were in the same colour robes at the end which must have been a wardrobe challenge but one that was successfully met. The period was appropriately researched for the 1980s costumes and the pop socks rekindled some memories.

Choreography (URSULA EMBERTON)

The choreography for this show was very well crafted – some interesting moments (like the use of the chairs, and the movement in "*HARD WORK*") but it was the energy and obvious passion the group have for their dance that impressed me most. The dance moves looked slick and very well rehearsed.

Musical Director (PETER JOHN DODSWORTH)

The cast had clearly been well rehearsed by Peter with everyone, principals and chorus alike, knowing what they had to do and provided a good balance sound.

Director (JULIAN FOX)

A very slick show with characters exceptionally well defined and movement realistically performed. There was good use of staging throughout. Particularly notable was the use of Tyrone DSR. Thought had been given of using different levels on the stage that added interest to the scenes.

Programme

The 16 paged programme was mainly in black and white but with a colour cover. It provided a good comprehensive and interesting read. The head shots of the cast were a little small but were clear. I liked the quotes in an article entitled "what the youth say" from the members about their time with the group.

This was my second time watching this talented group and they did not disappoint. My wife and I thoroughly enjoyed the evening and we are already looking forward to next years show.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Bird', written in a cursive style.

Gordon Bird
NODA representative
London region, District 14