



Society: The Pump House Children and Youth Theatre
 Production: Les Miserables (School Edition)
 Date: Thursday 19th January 2006
 Venue: The Pump House Theatre
 Report by: Lennie Self

Report

I am sure that there are many members of amateur operatic societies throughout Hertfordshire who are envious of the Pump House Youth and Children's Theatre for having the opportunity to perform one of the greatest musicals of the twentieth century, Les Miserables, (which is only licensed for schools and youth groups).

This was very ambitious project for any organization, but thanks to the efforts of everyone concerned with the production, especially Director Roger Martin, Musical Director Lee Farman and Choreographer Kelly Hardwige, all the hard work paid off, and despite a few teething troubles on first night you presented a show to be proud of. The standard of the performances elicited from these young people was praiseworthy indeed. From the moment "Look Down" began the audience was captivated by the powerful music and drama.

Director Roger Martin made the most of the exciting script and moved the large cast well within the restricted space of the Pump House stage. There was a very good use of levels, crowd scenes were powerfully staged and individual characters were well defined. There were some very nice innovative touches (e.g. the Thenadiers using a loaf of bread as a baby when begging).

Building the barricade looked marvelous and I liked the setting for the garden (although the gate was missing the second time it was set).

The ending, with the comrades who had died standing on the rostra behind the gauze, and the cast entering through the auditorium with lighted 'candles' was particularly poignant.

It is to Musical Director Lee Farman's credit that the complex music was sung so well, not only by the soloists, but all ensemble singing was of a high standard. Sharing solo lines gave as many people as possible a chance to sing on their own and was a very good idea as a lot of very promising voices were revealed.

I know that lack of space dictated that the orchestra had to be placed away from the stage, and the cast could see Lee on the monitor, but there was some feed back, and at times the orchestra and singers were not in time, especially noticeable in "Lovely Ladies". Overall the orchestra played the marvelous music well (although there was an occasional discordant phrase). The guitar accompaniment to "Drink With Me" was particularly beautiful and credit is due to Euan Hinshelwood.

The orchestra was too loud at times

Under Choreographer Kelly Hardwidges tutelage the chorus and group number all moved well. I particularly liked the movement for the whores and the girls playing the part certainly seemed to enjoy themselves (the torn tights were a nice authentic touch).

The set was very good. The setting for the court room was effective and building the barricades was brilliant.

Everybody worked hard for the production and did their best and there were no weak links in the cast, but please forgive me if I do not mention you by name. I am sure you will understand that with such a large cast it would not be feasible to write about every performer, (and of course I only saw one cast) but rest assured I was impressed by everyone and appreciate all your hard work. Being part of chorus or small group is just as important as being a soloist (actually, if someone has to drop out it is usually easier to find another principal than train someone to quickly learn the exacting routines expected of a chorus or group member). However, I would like to mention one young lady, Daisy Ausden who really stood out, singing well and reacting all the time she was on stage.

All the music was written for adult voices, and I have been told that there is very little difference between the adult and schools versions and so it is especially creditable that young Dominic Powell sang Jean Valjean's songs so well, especially "Who Am I?". He needed a tremendous vocal range, especially when singing "God on High", and gave a laudable performance singing well and displaying great emotion and acting ability.

From the moment he came on stage Christopher Wheeler was impressive. He dominated the stage as the obsessed Inspector Javert. His voice is even stronger than it was last year and he sang extremely well. He gave a very mature performance and appeared totally at home on stage.

What an impressive voice India Barby has. She had a wonderful tone and made a very good Fantine.

Thenadier is a gift of a part many adults would love to play and Jonathan Bolitho-Jones certainly did it justice, acting and singing with panache. With his blacked out teeth and superb, absurd costume he looked perfect for the part, and Toni Lovell made the ideal partner, Madame Thenadier. The setting, choreography and gradual build up for "Master of the House" was excellent, and everyone contrived to make it one of the highlights of the evening

Little Holly Sullivan quickly elicited the sympathy of the audience as the cruelly treated child Cosette, and she sang "Castle on a cloud" beautifully. Millie Staveley-Taylor, playing the grown up Cosette sang well and acted well all evening although "A Heart full of Love", was pitched high for both her and Marius.

Chloe Pamplin looked suitably cosseted as the young Eponine and Emily Kiddle played the role of grown up Eponine with conviction and sang "On My Own" well, although she does have a tendency to sing in a "pop" idiom. Her raincoat looked decidedly modern

David Thomas sang the Bishop's lines well (I see he was the other Marius).

"Red and Black" sounded wonderful with very good solo lines from Enjoiras, (Nicholas Gorre) who has a wonderful voice Marius (Sean Curren) who acted with feeling all evening Grantaire (Sean Lovell) and melodic singing the rest of the students.

Tom Scarborough was excellent as Gavroche, singing and acting superbly. His death was very touching and evoked the sympathy and horror of the audience.

The whole cast sang all the ensemble numbers well.

The lighting plot was very effective and generally executed well. There were some beautiful effects. It is a pity Eponine was not spot lighted when singing down stage left.

Using the cast to help to move props ensured the show flowed well. People changing sets behind the gauze could be seen through light spill. Please remember, if you are waiting behind a gauze do stand still as you can be seen by the audience.

Throughout the evening on Thursday there was far too much smoke. At one stage it reached the fourth row of the audience. It is a wonder it did not affect the voices of the cast. Each time excessive smoke was used it caused the young lady sitting next to me to cough.

It must be a difficult task to costume such a large cast on a presumably limited budget, but generally the costumes looked good and were in period.

I did not see or hear a warning about the use of strobe lighting.

Thank you very much for your invitation and a superb evening's entertainment.

Lenne