

WITHAM OPERATIC WORKSHOP

Les Miserables School Edition by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schonberg.

Director: Nikki Mundell-Poole

Musical Director: Susannah Edom

Assistant to the Director: Charlotte Watling

Production Manager: Steve Rogers

Performed at Witham Public Hall on Tuesday 18th February at 7.30pm.

I was welcomed at Front of House by Donna Goddard and team and was able to discuss the performance at the end with Director Nikki Mundell-Poole. She confirmed that the cast is between eleven and eighteen years old.

The set was minimal, flexible, moveable and highly effective. It was also reversible with a barricade set on one side and a brick wall on the other. Props, mainly chairs and tables were moved on and off stage as needed and changes were fluent. In addition a screen mounted facing the audience identified each scene. Good use of lighting enhanced the set and was well used to enable the apparent suicide of Javert. Good sound effects included the sounds of gunfire and battle and water splashing in the River Seine. The colourful costumes were mainly hired from another amdram society and really helped the cast to 'live' their roles. There were a number of very quick costume changes !

There was a large and versatile orchestra well balanced and ably directed by Musical Director Susannah Edom which provided excellent support to the cast in this challenging musical. The music was a joy to listen to and I especially enjoyed the reeds. So many favourite songs ! The quality of the vocals achieved was impressive with some very strong solos delivered.

The casting was exemplary with this excellent young cast all performing to a high level. The blocking on stage made maximum use of the stage area and there was plenty of movement throughout.

Frank Thornton really impressed as Javert with good character interpretation and a well balanced and controlled singing voice. He was authoritative and suitably menacing. Fionn Crickett, as Valjean, coped well with some ambitious songs and acted this key role confidently with plenty of expression. I enjoyed his solos, Who Am I and Bring Him Home which were delivered with great feeling. A delicate Fantine was played very sensitively by Poppy Taylor with a lovely performance of I Dreamed A Dream . Eponine was well portrayed by Natalie Cowan who's solo of On My Own was highly emotional. The Thenardiers, Monsieur played by Luc Roberts and Madame played by Madison O'Grady were bawdy, outrageous and scheming and sang Master Of The House very effectively. Emily Tabor was a frightened Young Cosette whilst Niamh Cullen confidently took the role of older Cosette. Alex Batt, as Marius one of the students was well matched with Cosette and I appreciated their moving interpretation of A Heart Full Of Love. Alex also had a wistful and poignant solo of Empty Chairs At Empty Tables, sung with great feeling.

Of course Les Misérables demands a cheeky and energetic Gavroche and Max Midgley fitted the bill admirably! Well done !

The group of student 'soldiers' all performed well in their various parts with Enjolras played by Sam Howard being particularly strong and assertive. There were a number of smaller roles which were intrinsic to the plot, all well acted.

The large ensemble/chorus had plenty to do with lots of movement and singing which added greatly to the production.

Many congratulations to Director Nikki Mundell-Poole for her inspiration, creativity and ability to encourage the wealth of talent in this group.

This was a superb production and I congratulate everyone involved in any way.

Hazel Hole MBE
Regional Representative
NODA East
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