

LES MISERABLES - 2009

Michael Gray's Review

"Hugo's historical epic is too big for most stages, but WOW managed to tell his timeless story with passion and clarity. I particularly appreciated the precise diction of the whole cast. We heard words that are blurred even in the Queen's, even on the CD.

The familiar Bayard engraving stared out at us from the front cloth, then, against a charcoal sketch, the actors formed a series of stage pictures, letting Schönberg's operatic score work its magic. Nigel Northfield's lighting created some striking atmospheres.

And there were some very accomplished singer/actors among the large cast. Tom Ashby's solemn Bishop [he was later a student revolutionary], Zoe Rogers as Cosette, with a splendid Marius in Jake Davis. The Thenardiers, always a popular turn, were sharply characterized by Amy Trigg and Samuel Marks [in a frightful ginger wig!] Gavroche, the child who dies a hero's death, was a lively characterization by Elliott Elder. Faith Rogers was assured and affecting as Fantine, especially in Come to Me, her duet with Valjean, and in her return in spirit as he dies. Callum McKenzie was a strong Enjolras, and Sam Carlyle a touching Eponine.

Thomas Holland, slight of build and of voice, nevertheless made a memorable Valjean. Bitter at the beginning, his nobility shone through in later scenes, and he shaped his numbers with confidence and real empathy. His nemesis Javert was Thomas Clarke, whose strong voice and considerable stage presence made the most of "Stars" and his Seine suicide.

Perhaps inevitably, the choreography was limited; most of the effects were static. Amongst the most successful moments were the Montreuil ensemble, and the menacing barricade, lit from behind. "Empty Chairs", with the ghosts of the fallen, was also very moving.

WOW, and their Artistic Director/MD Jill Parkin [assisted by David Slater], should be very proud of their Les Mis Lite. Even on the first night the production had power and polish, and the audience rightly cheered it to the Public Hall rafters."