

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2024-2025

WOW!

Les Misérables, directed by Nikki Mundell-Poole

Adjudicated by Amanda Powell, assisted by Becky Clemens

22/02/2025

FRONT OF HOUSE

The FOH staff were very welcoming, making sure we had programmes etc.

The programme was very in-keeping with the feel of the show, and jam packed full of information to peruse with a message from the President of the society, a synopsis and cast rehearsal photographs.

SETTING/STAGE MANAGEMENT/PROPS

I was very impressed by the choice of the 2 barricade/wall/gates trucks, it helped clearly define the different places/scenes in the show, such as the sewers, pub, and Cosette's garden. The transitions between scenes were smooth and slick and all props were well sourced, fitted the period of the production and looked the part.

LIGHTING AND SOUND

Although the lighting was overall extremely effective, there was a lot of use of downlighting which often resulted in shadowed faces. There were also some missed lighting queues at the front/side of the stage (Javert singing in darkness!). Very clever use of lighting for the sewers, and the use of the starlight backdrop and effective timing of the creative lighting meant that the end of Javert's suicide was extremely moving! I also appreciated the lighting choice of colour of the French flag in the finale.

MUSIC

Well done to the Orchestra, who played their socks off (no breaks for musicians in Les Misérables!). They were lovely to listen to and thoroughly supported the cast throughout providing wonderful balance between cast and orchestra, although I did feel some of the pauses between music transitions were a little slow on occasion. Susannah Edom is to be congratulated on an excellent job! The cast were vocally strong and confident throughout, no easy feat in a production as musically challenging as Les Mis.

COSTUME

A well sourced and coordinated production. The costumes were all very well suited to the period of the show, really helping the audience to capture the mood and style. I liked the colour contrast between the muted/darker tone costumes compared to those used in the wedding scene. Please be careful not to place wigs too far forward, especially when there is a lot of downlighting.

DIRECTION/CHOREOGRAPHY

Nikki arranged the staging and movement to suit the show extremely well, with a good use of space on stage. The cast had a good understanding of pace, aided by the music and lyrics. I would have liked to have seen the gates in Cosette's garden scene used more; for Cosette to follow Valjean through the gates, for Marius and Eponine to stay downstage, and to spot Cosette through the gate. This would have created some interaction through the gate and allowed Eponine to hide and eaves drop, giving her more scope for emotion. I did feel further movement/reactions/interaction were required between Valjean and Enjolras and Valjean and Javert at points, there were

moments where they were stationary waiting for their next part of music to start. Nice moments of choreography in the wedding scene, which helped to set the scene in a simple but effective way. Nice moments of tableau in the cafe. I very much liked the iconic end to Act 1 with One Day More; although I would have liked the steps to start smaller to allow more of a build and contrast.

PERFORMANCES

FIONN CRICKETT (Valjean):

A lovely vocalist who was a pleasure to listen to. Just a little more work on characterisation was needed, as well as understanding purpose and intention in movement when conveying songs.

FRANK THORNTON (Javert):

Frank performed with exceptional characterisation and a voice to match. Reminiscent of the iconic Javert we know from the West End. The voice was placed perfectly to create the aggression and intention behind each word. Excellent diction throughout. Stars and Suicide were highlights of the show. Bravo!

POPPY TAYLOR (Fantine):

Poppy delighted us with a beautiful voice and gave us a fabulous vocal range of light and shade. She gave purpose and meaning to her words and wasn't afraid to lighten the voice, especially in her reprise in act 2, which was magical. 'I Dreamed a Dream' had lovely contrast and emotion, meaning that she held the audience captive without ever needing to move. A wonderful natural and emotive performance, well done.

NATALIE COWAN (Eponine):

A very watchable actress, who has a powerful voice. I would have liked to have heard just a little more light and shade in your vocals, perhaps more use of your head voice when conveying softer moments in the show would have helped with this.

LUC ROBERTS (Thenardiers):

A strong and characterful performer, with good vocals and characterization throughout. Luc commanded the stage very well during 'Master of the House' and at the wedding. Great interactions and well matched with Madison.

MADISON O'GRADY (Madame Thenardiers):

A confident performer who held her own and worked well with Luc throughout. Lovely facial expressions and good vocals but try not to finish the end of each sentence with an 'ah' inflection when singing.

SAM HOWARD (Enjolras):

A clear strong voice enabled Sam to lead the men at the barricades with conviction. Sam was brimming with stage presence and was great fun to watch. A solid performer with good vocals. Well done.

NIAMH CULLEN (Cosette):

A very nice performer who held herself well onstage and gave us excellent vocals. Niamh's acting and reacting was excellent throughout, giving us some lovely natural acting moments; confusion as to why she and her father had to stay so private, her delight in finding love, and her sadness, first when Marius leaves and later when finding out the truth about her father as he dies.

ALEX BATT (Marius):

A nice expressive performer with a good voice, but a little more practise in supporting your vocals would help you to control some of the more powerful notes. Good facial expressions throughout, especially in the café but try to avoid too much acting in profile as we lost some of those lovely expressions.

EMILY TABOUR (Young Cosette):

A very nice voice that was crystal clear. A lovely performer who clearly showed her wistful dreaming when singing 'Castle on a Cloud'. Emily also conveyed her sadness and fear when being made to go into the woods alone.

MAX MIDGLEY (Gavroche):

A very talented performer. Max had great diction, vocals and intonation, commanded the stage and expressed himself perfectly. You could easily have picked him up and plopped him onstage at the Sondheim Theatre in the West End!

SUPPORTING ROLES & ENSEMBLE:

The energy and talent of all the supporting cast and ensemble really helped drive this show and all the company numbers were very strong, both in vocals and acting. Supporting your fellow cast members is an extremely important task which you all managed wonderfully! There were so many highlights from the supporting cast, 'Master of the House', 'Do you hear the People Sing' and 'One Day More' to name just a few. A general note; please always pay attention to the Orchestra to help with tuning. Well done to all.

OVERALL

Becky and I were blown away by all the talent on stage! It's a big task to put on this musical, with a huge amount of music and lyrics to learn, and the cast did well in conveying the overall style and production of the musical. We found this production to be highly entertaining and the cast held both ours and the audience's attention throughout. There were so many high points and beautifully emotive, stand-out performances, and everyone portrayed their characters well. The staging was cleverly thought out, as were the lighting effects and the orchestra was a delight to listen to. The transitions from scene to scene were smooth, and the dancing, movement and blocking/direction in the show was of a very good standard. I found the enthusiasm of the entire cast to be a big highlight of the show.

You all made a great team, there is so much talent in this group and it was a pleasure to watch you all.

Well done WOW!

Best wishes,

Amanda Powell (NETG Adjudicator)