

NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION LONDON REGION

Society ; The Community of Hungerford Theatre Company
Production ; *"CAROUSEL"*
Date ; Friday 19th February 2010
Venue ; John O'Gaunt Community Technology College
Report by ; Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - Area 13

From the magical evocation of the Carousel in the overture to the majestic and moving strains of the immortal '*You'll Never Walk Alone*', this giant of the musical stage remains timeless and 'starbright'! The poignant story of the faithful 'Julie' and her brutish husband 'Billy' is one of the most powerful books of the musical theatre and perfectly matches its extraordinary score. On Friday 19th February 2010 I was invited to review this show presented by The Community of Hungerford Theatre Company at the John O'Gaunt Community Technology College. Everybody from the Principals to Chorus and Dancers gave a performance which captivated the capacity audience with the result that Hungerford can be proud of their Community Theatre Company.

Julie Gower - (JULIE JORDAN) - Julie had a good vocal quality and it was true in every aspect, it had warmth, feeling and depth with excellent control, particularly in the number '*What's the Use of Wonderin*'. Julie got right inside this part, showing her love for the man she married, against all advice, and even after suffering all the trials and tribulations in the short, stormy relationship, you could still see this love shining through - An excellent portrayal - Congratulations.

Rob Talbot - (BILLY BIGELOW) - This was a good interpretation of the Carousel Barker, bringing out all the bragging and coarseness of the part, but at the same time displaying an undercurrent of insecurity. His feelings towards 'Julie' and his short temper was well displayed, but on occasions he needed to project his speaking voice more as at times the words could not be heard. Vocally Rob sang well in most of his numbers. His singing of the 'soliloquy', quite a difficult number to put across, was well done. Overall this was a well played part.

Karen Ashby - (CARRIE PIPPERIDGE) - Karen gave this part the correct interpretation. Her diction, movement, stage presence and characterisation was well presented all coupled with a pleasant singing voice. Her rapport with both 'Julie' and 'Mr Snow' was well contrived making this a most believable character - Well done.

Paul Hyde - (ENOCH SNOW) - This was a good characterisation portraying 'Mr Snow' to perfection. His movements, mannerisms and feelings towards 'Carrie' were spot-on all coupled with good diction. Vocally he sang very well and which came to the fore with 'Carrie' in the number '*When The Children Are Asleep*' which was beautifully presented - Congratulations.

Helen Bonner - (NETTIE FOWLER) - This is probably a part that most actresses and singers would love to play. Although only a small part in the production, it has the one musical number that sets it apart from most of the others, I refer of course to the haunting '*You'll Never Walk Alone*', but it has to be sung properly and this we had on the night of my visit with Helen giving a good presentation of this number - Well done.

Steve Horne - (JIGGER CRAIGIN) - This character is an evil manipulating 'Wharf Rat' who coerces 'Billy' into his nefarious activities which eventually gets him killed. Steve gave a reasonable presentation of this character although I would have liked to have seen more evil portrayed. His movement about the stage area could not be faulted but I would have liked more projection on his speaking voice as at times the words could not be heard. Vocally he gave a well sung number '*Blow High, Blow Low*'.

Tessa Brown - (Mrs MULLIN) - Tessa played the female owner of the Carousel, surviving in a man's world and with a 'soft-spot' for 'Billy'. This was a good interpretation of the fading, blousy, hard-bitten female, intent on getting Billy back into her clutches.

Becky Horne - (LOUISE) - This was a lovely interpretation of 'Billy's' daughter 'Louise', a part that only comes into its own in the ballet sequence in Act II. This was beautifully danced with excellent choreography, extracting all the emotion and frustration of the part and which was carried through to the final 'Graduation Scene' - Congratulations.

Aaron Williams (*Understudy for Gavin Strong*) - (ENOCH SNOW, Jr) - This young man did very well. His movements with 'Louise' were precise and his rapport with her was excellent. This was a nicely presented character.

Rob Chicken - (DAVID BASCOMBE) - This is a small but integral part of the overall performance and I liked Rob's interpretation of the Mill Owner, and his confrontation with 'Billy' and 'Jigger' was very well played - A good presentation

James Hodgkin - (HEAVENLY FRIEND)

Dave Whiddett - (STARKEEPER & Dr SELDON) - I have combined these parts together. Dave as the 'Starkeeper' was exactly right, exhibiting just the right amount of cynicism when dealing with 'Billy', but when playing 'Dr Seldon' he showed his softer side. As the 'Heavenly Friend' James was flawless as the escort for 'Billy' (all that was missing was the Halo!!) - These two had impact.

Richard Hewitt - (1st POLICEMAN)

Sean Wood - (2nd POLICEMAN)

Hoffi Munt - (ARMINY)

Terry Brooks - (CAPTAIN)

Tristan Ashby - (CARNIVAL BOY) - These minor roles were well filled by this group. They accepted the parts they had been apportioned and developed their own individual characters. The movement about the stage was well controlled and they ensured the show was the success it was.

Junior Chorus - This group of youngsters certainly entered into the spirit of the show. They were not over-awed by the occasion and they knew well their movements, entrances and exits - Well done

Townspeople and Amusement Park Carnies - This large Chorus certainly filled the stage with movement and colour and sang well with a good balance of voices. Movement about the stage, although crowded, was well controlled and it was pleasing to see that everybody displayed a joy of performing presenting a wealth of various characters.

Tristan Ashby, Kayleigh Goddard, Zoe Hobbs, Becky Horne, Marion McCorkindale, Hoffi Munt, Roushka Munt, Stephanie Richardson, Michaela Williams - (DANCERS) - This group of dancers interpreted the choreographers' routines very well, they were together and precise in their movements, making an extravaganza of colour and movement and which fitted in well with the content of the performance.

David Clayton - (DIRECTOR) - Presenting this show within the confines of the stage must have been a logistical nightmare with such a large cast, but you certainly achieved it and obviously your previous experience with producing Gang Shows helped. By and large the audience was presented with a good evening's entertainment and positioning within the stage area was well executed. It had been well cast with some good characterisations being brought out of the principals. The large chorus also worked well and exhibited a joy of performing which certainly came across to the audience. Entrances and exits were obviously a problem as it would appear wing space was at a premium but good use was made of entrances and exits through the auditorium which helped to relieve the congestion. A fairly new innovation in this show is to present a tableau during the overture which I believe is part of the licence these days. The problem as I see it is that the overture is long and the tableau gets a bit wearing for the audience. I have seen numerous societies endeavour to try and resolve this matter, frequently without success. I just wonder if the tableau was started about half way through the overture would it make it less boring - Just a passing thought - Apart from that point Congratulations on your presentation.

Simon Coles, Paul Hyde, Giulia Rowland - (MUSICAL DIRECTORS) - This trio of Musical Director's has obviously worked hard with this large cast, resulting in some good, balanced singing from both adults and juniors.

John Miles - (CONDUCTOR) - John kept his ten musicians under strict control playing the music as Rogers and Hammerstein intended. The orchestra made a well balanced sound throughout the performance and played most sympathetically for the performers on stage. To achieve this balance was no easy task, there being no orchestra pit.

Tara Burden - (CHOREOGRAPHER) - Tara had compiled some first-class choreographic routines which fitted the action of the production and was well danced by the corps of dancers, being precise in their movements - Well done.

Stage Manager & Crew - A well managed stage throughout the performance with swift scene changes, no easy task within the confines of the stage.

Lighting Design & Operation - Within the confines of this school hall the lighting design had been well devised ensuring the stage area was well lit with no shadows being visible. The coloured 'gel's' used ensured the right atmosphere was generated in the various scenes. Operation on the night of my visit appeared spot-on.

Sound - This aspect appeared well controlled with no noticeable distortion.

Wardrobe Mistress & Team - Dressing such a large cast must have been quite a challenge but Norma and her team had obviously worked wonders. All the principals were appropriately dressed which portrayed the period and location perfectly. The chorus both adult and children had also been well dressed with all costumes looking fresh and clean and well fitting - Well done.

Properties - The properties had been well researched, they looked authentic and relevant to the action on stage.

Continuity - This is a person who seldom receives any plaudits for normally sitting in the 'Wings' following the script intently to ensure that should a principal 'dry' they can get them out of difficulty by a prompt - So Liz, take a bow, you deserve it.

Set Design, Construction and Decor - The set design had been well devised to cover all the various scene locations ensuring as much space was made possible on stage for the performers. It had been well constructed and the decor could not be faulted. I must say I was most impressed to see a real life, operating Carousel on stage during the opening sequence, so often I see mock-up's or coloured lights so it was refreshing to see the scenic designers had incorporated a real Carousel, it makes such a difference - Well done.

Programme - This was an attractive programme which contained many items of interest, all printed on good quality paper. It had been well laid out with well reproduced photographs and a colourful, eye-catching cover. I was sorry not to see any reference in the programme to your affiliation to NODA. If you need a copy of the Crest, one can be obtained from NODA Headquarters.

Front of House - Front of House staff were smart, friendly and helpful to their audience.

Thank you for inviting me to review your latest presentation and for your excellent hospitality and may I congratulate you on your 30th anniversary and wish you all success with your future productions

Henry

NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13