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Society : ELODS
Production : My Fair Lady
Date : 23/10/2021
Venue : Wyllyotts Theatre
Report by : Paul M Holgate

Show Report

This classic musical made an excellent choice for a welcome return to the boards for the company and was presented to an appreciative audience.

Music was, as ever, under the expert direction of Mark Newport. Balance between the stage and the pit was perfect. Chorus was well drilled though the men's section was bottom heavy.

Direction from Susan Payne included a lot of movement to keep the audience engaged. The opening scene was well blocked with a lot of characterisation from chorus members who all sang and danced with enthusiasm. I thought the dancers/street entertainers were excellent. Choreography from Paula Bland was suited to the cast and performing area. Dances accompanying "With a Little Bit of Luck" and "I'm Getting Married in the Morning" were boisterously performed.

The servants' chorus sang really well together but often had to sing when on the move which broke focus occasionally.

Be careful of exits when moving large numbers off stage; there was some hugger-mugger when the chorus was exiting left.

I understand the practicalities of placing the Embassy Ball after the interval, rather than before, but it did make it seem a little anticlimactic.

I won't mention names, but principals must avoid singing or speaking up-stage even when miked.

Costumes were well selected. The traditional black and white of the Ascot scene was particularly striking. Eliza's blue gown and hat in Act II were stunning. Mrs Higgins' Act II ensemble was unflattering, and the hemline was too short for 1912. Some men's footwear was noticeably too modern – Doolittle's in particular. Higgin's shoes did not distinguish him as a gentleman and Pickering's did not look particularly military. Pickering should have had carpet slippers to wear with the smoking jacket (and he should not have put his feet up on the chesterfield when wearing outdoor shoes). Doolittle should not have put his hat on while still in Higgins' study.

The Embassy Ball was very well costumed – nice to see that those ladies with short-sleeved dresses were wearing elbow length gloves, it is a detail that is often missed. There was appropriately 'showy' costuming for Zoltan Karpathy and the Queen of Transylvania.

LX plot was sound although Eliza was in the shadows towards the end of "Wouldn't it be Lovely?". Ascot, the Embassy Ball and Mrs. Higgins' conservatory were all beautifully lit.

The armchair in Higgins' study was too modern. A throw or an antimacassar set would have helped to disguise its mid twentieth century lines. The nosegay should have had paper and string wrapped around it to make it look more realistic. I liked the flower market although the two extra columns seemed a little redundant. The Inn Sign and the Wimpole Street doorway looked really good.

Jude Stoughton was an engaging Eliza Doolittle and brought out the character's raw determination. She managed the switch between the 'common' and 'refined' accents very well. Her body language during "You Did It" made the character's feelings very plain. She sang with great charm. "I Could Have Danced All Night" was a highlight of the production.

John Isaac was a textbook Professor Higgins. He maintained a detached air throughout much of the piece, which suited the character well. I especially liked his delivery of the demanding "Why Can't the English?". His baffled expression at Eliza's behaviour in Act II – leading into "A Hymn to Him" – was most amusing.

Stephen Milligan was clearly revelling in the part of Alfred Doolittle which seemed to fit him like a glove. He stole every scene that he appeared in. The change in his character once he had become 'respectable' was nicely observed. His 'drunk' acting was very realistic.

The well-intentioned but dull Freddy Eynsford-Hill was given a touch of earnestness by Henry Martin's portrayal. He displayed exemplary stage-presence during "On the Street Where You Live" and reacted well to Eliza during "Show Me".

Leanne Lynch affected a wonderfully rounded 'upper middle-class' accent as Mrs Higgins. This was combined with delightfully imperious deportment. A very good reading of the part

Richard Hutchinson was a solid Colonel Pickering with a convincing military air. I thought that he could have brought out more of the humour in the telephone scene which seemed rushed.

There was also excellent support from Naomi Delamore as the long-suffering Mrs Pearce. Other notable contributions were from the two maids featured in "I Could Have Danced All Night" and Nic Corden as a pompous Zoltan Karpathy. I also thought that Mrs. Hopkins' dialogue was very well delivered.

The programme was nicely designed and packed with interesting information including clear cast and rehearsal photographs. Thank you for including the NODA logo. Please consider entering your programme for the competition. Further details are available on the NODA website or directly from me.

I was most sad to hear of the passing of Lisa Nnando-Shillingford – a great loss to amateur theatre in the area.

Many thanks for your invitation and a warm welcome from front of house. My congratulations on a colourful and entertaining show. I look forward to seeing further presentations by your society.