



Society : SLOUGH, WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD THEATRE COMPANY
Production : **HAIR**
Date : Thursday 12th April 2012
Venue : Theatre Royal, Windsor
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

I was delighted to be invited to see my first Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead Theatre Company's production of "**Hair**" on Thursday 12th April at the wonderful Theatre Royal Theatre in the centre of Windsor.

The self publicised "American tribe love-rock musical" caused a huge sensation when it opened on Broadway 1968. It opened in London's West End on 25th September of that year, just after the changes to the censorship restrictions. So with nudity, swearing, songs entitled "*Sodomy*", "*Hashish*" and "*Coloured Spade*"; introducing themes of sexual liberation, black power, anti-war, legalisation of drugs and the futility of war; you can understand why it ran for nearly 2,000 shows. However, now that we are less shocked by some of these themes we take for granted on TV as well as live theatre, would these issues seem rather out of date? And won't the musical be un-interesting to a relatively more street wise 21st century audience?

If this production is anything to go by then the answer is a resounding "no!" This scintillating, energetic and imaginative production was as fresh today as it would have been 41 years ago.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq still make the anti-war message very pertinent. The recent debate regarding gay marriages in Church shows that in some views there are still inequality wars to be fought. And although youngsters don't necessarily grow their hair long and drop out of school/college, they still rebel against their parents' wishes and government legislation.

This ensemble cast worked splendidly as a team and under the careful direction, all the themes were presented without ever attempting to lecture the audience.

The lighting aspects were imaginatively set – with backlighting, spot lighting, flame lighting, UV lighting – all being very effectively executed.

There were a range of effects to keep us on our toes. This was exemplified when the second half literally started with a bang (resulting with a wonderful festoon of confetti falling from the ceiling).

CLAUDE (RICHARD CAMPBELL)

Although Claude is caught up in air of pacifism, it is his indecision of burning his draft card ultimately leads to his demise. Richard excelled as the main character – showing wonderful moments, particularly during his drug induced "trip". His facial expressions were superb. His indecision regarding the plight of his draft card was very well played. Not only were we treated to an excellent acting performance, his singing was first class too! A mesmerising performance!

BERGER (DAMIEN SOLLESSE)

I have had the opportunity to see Damien perform several times over the years but in my opinion this was his best performance. He brilliantly commanded the scenes as the main leader of the tribe but

was sensitive enough not to upstage others around him. His singing was, as always, superb; but his character in this role was his best to date. From his opening striptease to “entertain” the audience, to a confrontational scene with his girlfriend, demanded a range of acting skills that Damien duly delivered.

SHEILA (STEPHANIE DUNLEAVY)

Stephanie sang her numbers “*I Believe in Love*”, the feel good and well known song “*Good Morning Starshine*” and her solo “*Easy to be Hard*” superbly. Stephanie is another actress who combined her good singing voice with excellent acting skills. I was particularly impressed with her facial expressions and noticed that when she was not speaking she reacted to what is going on stage. A skill that is not always present. Well done on an excellent performance.

WOOF (ANDY SONDEN)

A lovely character part! Andy certainly threw himself into this role. His singing was very good, especially noticeable during his solo in “*Sodom*”, where he performed magnificently. Andy maintained his character throughout the production.

HUD (TIM BELL)

A competent performance by Tim as the character Hud. Tim sang well during his numbers “*Coloured Spade*”, “*I’m Black*” and “*Abie, Baby*”. He clearly understood what his role was about and delivered a thoughtful performance.

DIONNE (JENNIFER BIRD)

Jennifer has a lovely signing voice and confidently opened the show singing “*Aquarius*”. She sang superbly throughout the show, especially in “*Air*”, “*Eyes, Look Your Last*” and “*Hippie Life*”. As with everyone else in the ensemble, Jennifer competently acted all the different characters.

CHRISSY (SARAH PINKNEY)

Chrissy epitomised the enthusiasm of the production. She danced energetically in every routine, acted earnestly in every scene. Her solo performance in “*Frank Mills*” was equally impressive. This was a superb performance by an accomplished and versatile artist.

JEANIE (SOPHIE BARBER)

Sophie performed her solo part in “*Air*”, excellently. She also understood her character and played it with understanding and sensitivity. My only slight criticism in otherwise an excellent performance, was that I could not see your reaction following the moment Berger hit you. You stood side on, and with your long hair I was unable to see your facial expression. Was it one of shock, surprise, resignation or acknowledgement? Certainly the reconciliation scene was very well acted and managed to see your facial expression perfectly.

STEVE (LEE RICHARD)

Like the other members of the cast, Lee performed energetically and understood what was required of his part. He sang well, particularly in the song “*Don’t Put it Down*”.

MARGARET MEADE (MATTHEW FILMORE)

Interestingly, the last time I saw Matthew, he was in a dress, acting as the Dame in "Treasure Island". So it was no surprise to see him don a frock again! He introduced superb comic moments into the show with his mannerisms and gestures. He also showed his range during the two numbers "My Conviction". I am looking forward to seeing him without his dress in his next show!

MOTHER (JEAN JOHNSON) & FATHER (ROMAN LACH)

These were two smaller roles that were very competently performed by Jean and Roman. In particular, I was impressed with their performance in the moving final scene where they were informed about the death of their son. We saw the action of the body being covered at the same time the parents received the bad news telegram. This was a very evocative scene that was superbly acted.

CHORUS (THE TRIBE)

I think it always says something about a show when you are aware of the quality of the chorus. And this production had a very well drilled, co-ordinated and enthusiastic chorus that clearly enjoyed their performance. The dancing was well delivered and their energy is to be applauded – especially as I understood that this was their second performance of the day! I would not have known, considering the efforts produced!

DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER (SIMON WOODBRIDGE)

Simon can be congratulated on producing an excellent show. From the opening number "Aquarius" to the poignant last scene, the show moved effortlessly. I was impressed with the quality of the chorus and noticeably they have worked exceptionally hard and very well directed. The singing was first class. The dance moves were energetic and interesting to watch. I loved the addition of the effects – like the snow falling during the final scene, the blinding lights into the audience during the scene changes of the trip scene, and the UV painted body! This was a show that had been well thought out and executed.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR (PETER DODSWORTH)

The orchestra under the direction of Peter was excellent. It complimented the singers perfectly. All of the soloists performed excellently and the ensemble worked very well together.

STAGE MANAGER (ALICIA WALKER)

The stage was very well managed by Alicia and her crew. All cues seemed on time and there were no obvious pauses between scenes.

LIGHTING (ANDY NICHOLSON)

An excellent lighting plot by Andy and exceptionally well executed. I dread to think how many cues there were, but all seemed to be performed very well indeed. There were some wonderful imaginative plots. The cue of introducing the flame lights DSR and DSL on the chorus of "Aquarius" was pleasantly effective. The single spot on the flag covered body at the end of the show, picking out the falling snow, was equally stunning and poignant. The only small disappointment was that the stage left of the platform was not very well lit so whoever stood there was in darkness. But this is a small niggle and in no way detracted from a first class lighting plot. A lot of thought, imagination and effort had clearly gone into the lighting and Andy can be congratulated as it helped in enhancing the production.

SOUND

The principals wore mics but the balance between the signing and orchestra was excellent and the sound engineers can be congratulated on an enjoyable performance.

PROPERTIES (MARGARET LYNCH. MARTYN PINNOCK)

The properties all seemed to be in place and appropriate to the scenes and plot. I could not fault the use of any of the props in this production.

COSTUMES (ISABELLE FOLEY & MARINA BANFIELD)

There was a full range of costumes that looked fabulous. There were magnificent 60's looking blue and yellow outfits for the two girl singing groups in Act 2, the yellow robes for the "Be In", the flared jeans (I remember wearing those!), the colourful flower outfits – all fitting to the period. Oh, and a spaceman! Clearly a lot of work has gone into the research and making/hiring of the costumes that added to a successful production.

I completely enjoyed this production of **Hair**. The energetic performance was first rate and an audience member next to me said "I wanted to stand at the end – it was so good but didn't want to be the only one". I think if she had more courage, she would have not been standing alone in giving her appreciation to an enjoyable evening by a talented group.

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