



Society : SWMTC Productions
Production : Made in Dagenham the musical
Date : 13 – 17 September 2016
Venue : Norden Farm, Maidenhead
Report by : Susan Pickles

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Show Report

While this production played for a relatively short time in the West End many people would have seen the film or even lived through the industrial strife of the late 60's and early 70's. This well written and scored musical is a godsend for the amateur drama world which craves new materials to perform. Having seen many SWMTC shows I think the move to Norden Farm for this production was the perfect outcome as the theatre provided a blank and more industrial backdrop for the time period and the Ford factory setting. Made in Dagenham the musical is based on a true story that probably had a direct effect on the lives of many in the audience and the cast alike. It reflects a time before Women's Lib when the differential in pay between men and women was much more so than now.

An amazingly talented production team and cast enthralled the audience from start to finish - even though it was quite a long show – an emotional rollercoaster right through to the joyful culmination.

DIRECTOR (Sarah Dunleavy)

Regardless of how well a script is written the Director still has to have the vision for the show and design how the production will be presented in the venue. As already stated I think Norden Farm was a great venue for this show and Sarah was able to use the large stage to accommodate all the players and also use the side and top balconies to add interest. The casting was pretty perfect and the attention to detail in defining each character was impressive. The movement of the players in each scene and between scenes was well thought out and ensured that there were not too many prolonged blackout moments. I can only assume that a lot of work was done on accents and the maintaining of them in both spoken and sung words; you also tackled the "swearing" in a way that did not come across as offensive in any way but was very authentic for that character. Good attention to the comedy moments and the grittiness of this real life story.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR (Anton Gwilt)

All the musical numbers were very well rehearsed and well sung with a great amalgamation of the desires of the Director and the Choreography. The only comment I have is that the more dramatic numbers could have been portrayed with a bit more grit/emotion – the singing was great but at time a bit too "nicely" sung. A small band played really well and melded with the voices brilliantly without overpowering.

CHOREOGRAPHY (Simon Woodbridge and Hannah Stone)

All the movement was sympathetically done and within the capabilities of the cast. The routines were not overly complicated but were really effective and performed well by the large cast; they complimented the different numbers and the emotion being portrayed. The extra wide stage also meant that everyone could be seen.

RITA O'GRADY (Adèle Contreras)

A wonderful portrayal of Rita in every aspect by a talented actress from the very opening of the show in the rather complicated "Busy Woman" number through to the uplifting "Stand Up" at the end; Adèle kept the wonderful "London" working class accent throughout the show. Rita is a typical woman of that era that raised a family and went to work for a few pounds and was happy with that...we saw clearly the slow realisation of how wrong this was and the gradual breakdown of family life as she took up the fight for equality for women. A most believable characterisation.

EDDIE O'GRADY (Matt Filmore)

Anyone that casts Matt in any part will know that he will give his all. Eddie is a man who loves his wife and the status quo as a Ford worker; he is quite a modern husband and is even happy to support Rita as she reluctantly takes up the fight as told in "Sorry I love you". The breakdown of their relationship is all the more painful during "The Letter". A wonderful portrayal by Matt.

MONTY (Keith Sullivan)

One of the Union conveners; he is one of the men but also has the challenge of representing "the women" - clearly a thankless task. A really sensitive portrayal of Monty who has to follow the management rule but is secretly sympathetic to the cause of his union members. The sub plot between him and Connie unfolds and concludes in a very poignant scene in the hospital. We were all on his side by the end of the show.

CONNIE RILEY (Jo Godsmark)

Like Monty we got to know Connie slowly but she came into her own during her solo number "Same old song" which was sung with such passion and conviction. I would have liked Connie to speak with the same conviction as she sung, the dialogue was delivered in a quiet way but this in no way detracted from the overall performance by Jo.

BERYL (Nikki Maine)

Oh how we all secretly wanted to be Beryl. Totally unconcerned about what she said or who she said it to. A brilliant portrayal of this belligerent character, great awareness of those around her, good comic timing and sympathetic attention to the swearing by not emphasising the delivery - it was just part of who she was. A wonderful character role perfectly played by Nikki.

SANDRA (Tilly Rose Mitchell)

CLARE (Emily Slatter)

CASS (Claire Dunford)

Along with Beryl these three characters formed the main support of Ford girls working with Rita. Each of the actresses portrayed their characters really well from the young flighty Sandra, Irish red headed innocent Cass and the word forgetting slightly dippy Clare. Emily brilliantly sang "Wosname" as she bravely volunteered to speak up for the rights of women.

MR HOPKINS (Dan Cunningham)

LISA HOPKINS (Claire Martin)

The Ford MD and his repressed wife; she is probably more intelligent than him having gone to university and earned herself a degree. A suitable dour and establishment portrayal of Mr Hopkins was a little quiet in delivery but voice projection comes with experience so Dan I hope that you continue to tread the boards. Lisa Hopkins a frustrated housewife who secretly abhors the inequality of women and the caning regime at the local boy's school. Well done for maintaining that accent Claire.

HAROLD WILSON (Ashleigh J C Wells)

BARBARA CASTLE (Melissa Embleton)

What fun these two had as the *idiot* Prime Minister and the *fiery as her hair* Barbara Castle. As with all the other players difficult accents had to be mastered and maintained which they both did brilliantly. The scenes they had together were particularly noteworthy. In particular I enjoyed the "Always a problem" number with the PM and his aides – really good choreography for this number. Melissa portrayed the difficult situation that Barbara Castle was in as a female labour MP with an eye on the real world, especially with Harold as her Prime Minister, and we could see the range of her emotions throughout the show.

MR TOOLEY (Scott Kitson)

Nicely portrayed as the nasty hatchet man sent over from America to break the strike; looked the part and sounded the part.

GRAHAM O'GRADY (Ben Sharp)

SHARON O'GRADY (Bella Hopper)

Two lovely cameo roles as the children of Rita and Eddie. Both children played their roles well especially in the very opening scene of the show where they showed great playfulness and confidence. Well done to you both.

ENSEMBLE

In any large musical you absolutely need a great ensemble cast and this production certainly had one of the best I have seen recently. From the very beginning where we were introduced separately to the female and male ensemble in "Busy Women" and the title "Made in Dagenham" the singing/acting was really impressive. As far as I could see every member sang and moved well and acted throughout every song and importantly whenever they were on the stage. The group singing was of a really high standard and the blending of all the harmonies and top notes (well done Tilly) worked well. This was a long show – 3 hours with the interval – and I don't think at any stage the energy or enthusiasm dropped an iota. It was quite emotional at the end during the "Stand Up" final song and I felt compelled to stand up along with quite a few other women – and a few men – to show solidarity with these brave women. There were many small cameo roles undertaken by the ensemble – all were really well done – the male players had a busy time doubling up as union men and parliamentary aides. Special mention to Jack Brennan who played about 6 characters – all very different and all very accomplished – you can certainly tell a joke !

COSTUMES/HAIR/MAKEUP

Lovely to see lots of suitable period costumes, accessories and hair styles and it looked as if everyone had made a great effort to be as authentic as possible. Make-up well applied and looked good under the lights.

SET/PROPS

The setting was very simply done on a black stage with a small raised rostrum at the back. Small truck panels were used to depict different scenes – Ford Factory images when in the plant; Big Ben when in Houses of Parliament. Other larger props as the kitchen in the opening scene and the machines used by the women in the plant looked very authentic and of the period.

CREW

Alicia Harding, and what seemed to be a large crew, were able to make some tricky scene changes go quickly and smoothly requiring musical fill-ins only between a few scenes. The crew worked well and everyone seemed to know what they had to do – the crew choreography was well managed with so many people involved.

LIGHTING (Andy Nicholson)/SOUND (Matt Smith)

Well-designed lighting plot covering the whole stage area with scene changes that were well co-ordinated. I particularly liked the lighting for “The Letter”.

Sound was provided by radio mikes and stage mikes. All the principles were well heard during the songs via radio mike and the mixing with the ensemble worked well. I am not sure if radio mikes were used for the principles spoken word too but all could be heard. For some without radio mikes the delivery was a little quiet but did not detract from the overall presentation. The only real issues were that the stage announcer mike cut out a few times and at the very end we did not hear the final line about equal rights being approved by the TUC as there was so much going on.

PROGRAMME

A simple 12 page programme which featured images of the cast, some with biogs, and a list of all the songs. There was some background to the political scene at the time of the Dagenham strikes which was really interesting. On this occasion there was no NODA information.

Thank you to Rosemary for welcoming us.

This was a wonderful production where every member played their part on and off the stage. Terry and I, along with all the audience, enjoyed the evening very much. We hope the rest of the run was equally well received and we look forward to seeing you all again at your next show Dirty Rotten Scoundrels in April 2017.

Susan Boobyer-Pickles (and Terry Hunt)
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