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Society : Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead Theatre Company
Production : **OLIVER!**
Date : Thursday 29th October 2015
Venue : Theatre Royal, Windsor
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

Show Report

The latest production offered by SWMTC is the classic Lionel Bart musical, OLIVER!

Lionel Bart wrote the lyrics and music to this musical based on the novel Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens. The musical opened on the West End in 1960 and ran for 2,618 and was made into a very successful movie 1968.

I was very pleased to be invited to review the show and although this is not one of my favourite musicals, I did enjoy this production was impressed by all those involved.

The singing was of a very high quality and balanced nicely to the live orchestra. The movement was very well defined with clear direction. The young performers were exceptionally disciplined on stage and all should be proud of their contribution to a successful show.

MR BUMBLE (**WILLIAM BRANSTON**)

The pompous beadle of the workhouse where Oliver resides was played by William and although I thought the drunk in act one scene two was slightly over the top, overall the performance was very well observed. The songs *Food, Glorious Food, Oliver, I Shall Scream and That's Your Funeral* were sung very well but *Boy for Sale*, to me, was beautifully sung by William.

WIDOW CORNEY (**EVE MACDONALD**)

This was a lovely, confident character performance from Eve. I loved her clear singing voice which has such clarity (noticeable during all of her songs – *Oliver, Food Glorious Food* but particularly in *I Shall Scream*).

OLIVER (**THOMAS SMITH**)

I thought Thomas played the part of Oliver Twist very well. He had good clear direction and his relationships with the other characters were believable. I enjoyed his singing and *Where is Love* was beautiful and clearly sung by Thomas.

MRS SOWERBERRY (**PAMELA PRIOR**)

MR SOWERBERRY (**MARTIN BENNETT**)

I thought these two roles were very well cast. Martin looked every inch an undertaker. These two worked very well together. Characters were well thought out and portrayed. The slapstick of the coffin was very well worked.

CHARLOTTE (EMILY SLATTER)

NOAH CLAYPOLE (CALLUM YOUNG)

I have put these two characters together as they tended to appear on the stage at the same time. The casting was very good, as both created good, believable characters. I noticed that their strong dancing skills were added to some of the chorus numbers – but I was slightly confused if they were different characters or the same. For example, immediately following Oliver running away from the undertaker, we see Charlotte and Noah in street scene alongside the “missing” Oliver. Nonetheless, Emily and Callum performed their roles well – good clear voices, nicely played characters and added vocal and dancing strength and energy to the chorus scenes. I liked the little touches – Emily’s laugh, for example was appropriate to the character and Noah’s “attitude” was spot on.

ARTFUL DODGER (CHARLIE MULFORD)

The character of “Artful Dodger” is mischievous and cheeky and Charlie managed to portray these characteristics. However, I would like to have seen a little more consistency as there were some moments when the character was lost. Charlie’s singing and movement was first class and his interaction with Nancy and Oliver was believable. Overall this was a strong performance from this youngster. Well done.

FAGIN (MATTHEW FILMORE)

I have had the pleasure of watching Matthew many times over the years and this was another strong character performance by him. His acting was spot on, as was his character interpretation, reminding me of a Jewish Rabbi, with his long beard! The delivery of *Reviewing the Situation* was superb. On the evening I watched there was an unfortunate microphone incident (during *Be Back Soon*) but Matthew’s experience ensured the show continued without any hesitation of quality. The reprise of *Reviewing the Situation* had wonderful moments of comic delivery and lovely emphasis. Well done on a spectacular performance.

NANCY (ADELE CONTRERAS)

Adele was impressive from the moment she entered the stage, with *Fine Life*. She really got under the skin of the character and acted a perfect foil to menacing Sykes. Her singing was delightful with an outstanding *As Long As He Needs Me*, which was greeted with a huge deserved cheer from the audience.

CHARLEY (ANDREW WALKER)

This was a nicely observed performance by Andrew as Dodger’s pick-pocketing sidekick. Well done.

BET (JADE ELLEN KEMPSTER)

This was a nice role that was competently portrayed by Jade. She sung very well alongside Nancy in *Fine Life* and her movement was spot on.

BILL SYKES (BILLY REYNOLDS)

I liked the direction on this with a strong introduction to the character of Sykes with had a dramatic impact. Billy’s performance as the rogue was very well presented. The song *My Name* was full of menace and nicely controlled. His character was masterfully performed with good mannerisms – particularly in the scene when he retrieves Oliver.

ROSE SELLER (SAM HENRY)

MILKMAID (KELLY HOPPER)

KNIFE GRINDER (CALLUM YOUNG)

STRAWBERRY SELLER (LAURA-ANNE PUTTERFORD)

These four gave a wonderfully balanced rendition of *Who Will Buy?* Unfortunately I was a little blocked so could not see the rose seller who started in the auditorium but did hear her perfectly well. All of the soloists had good, clear voices and demonstrated their characters very well.

MR BROWNLOW (HOWARD GIBBS)

Howard presented the caring grandfather of Oliver with good, understated, presence. His character was very believable and the lines delivered very well, containing good weight and emphasis.

DR GRIMWIG (JACK BRENNAN)

OLD SALLY (NAOMI RAWLINSON)

MRS BEDWIN (JEAN JOHNSON)

These three smaller roles all added to good characterisation to the production. Old Sally could have easily been over played and I was pleased to see that Naomi judged it perfectly.

WORKHOUSE BOYS

The boys worked very well as a unit. I loved the change in mood when Mr Bumble entered. The timing was perfectly observed! The opening number, *Food, Glorious Food* was very well sung and movement clearly learnt with everyone knowing what they were doing. Unusually, the workhouse boys were all played by boys without any girls playing “boy” parts as I have often witnessed. This is merely an observation and not a criticism and just interested to know why the girls were omitted (other than the obvious reason of gender). It was certainly most authentic in that regard.

FAGIN’S GANG

All of the youngsters were well drilled and portrayed good, consistent characters throughout the evening. Movement was very well maintained, and concentration and energy levels were spot on. Characters were nicely developed.

CHORUS

Excellent energy throughout and no more illustrated than during the song *Consider Yourself*. Movement was very well defined with excellently observed entrances and exits. It was clear that chorus characterisation had been worked on with some well distinctive roles.

DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHER (ANN HERTLER-SMITH)

The opening song had good energy to start the show and Ann presented some different and appealing shapes, always keeping the audience interested. I liked the sharp change of the noisy boys to absolute silence when Mr Bumble enters. The infamous “more” line from Oliver was built up nicely. The slapstick of the pushing into the coffin was amusing and added good, well rehearsed comedy and reminded me of those old silent movies. I liked the stylised use of freeze frame for the introduction of Artful Dodger. The use of umbrellas in *I’ll Do Anything* was rehearsed and effective.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR (NEIL MATTHEWS)

Neil has worked wonderfully well in the many of the shows I have seen him direct and this was no difference. All of the cast knew what they were doing and were vocally very strong. The balances of the voices were aptly controlled. The soloists were all particularly strong.

STAGE MANAGER (ALICIA WALKER)

This was a well managed stage with smooth scene changes by Alicia and her crew.

SOUND (JAMES CRICHTON, DANIEL HERBERT)

The sound was nicely balanced, particularly between the orchestra and the singers. The microphones seemed to be well fitted.

LIGHTING (ANDY NICHOLSON)

I liked the use of the gobos that added detail and clarity to the scenes (for example, the use of a window gobo in the workhouse). The opening scene was very dark, to setting the mood correctly and I was pleased that the lighting was brought up for *Food Glorious Food*. Good use of follow spot. I liked the variety of lighting too – with the street lamps being lit and the gobo effect in final scene in London. The good range of colour washes added to production. All of the lighting effects appeared to be on cue.

PROPERTIES (MARGARET LYNCH, MARTYN PINNOCK)

To my eye the properties all looked appropriate to the Victorian period. I liked some of the additional attention to personalise some of the props, for example the large flagon for Sykes.

WARDROBE (JENNY HARRIS)

The Victorian clothes can cause societies a few headaches, but I was pleased to see a good range of pertinent costumes to the period. The costumes looked carefully to match the characters – I liked the overcoat for Fagin, for example, which suited his character perfectly. The green jacket for Sykes also suited the character.

MAKEUP

Overall the makeup was very well applied. I was particularly impressed with the boys in the workhouse as they were appropriately dirty and was very well seen from my position in the dress circle. The use of beards was excellent – particularly notable was that of Fagin's.

FRONT OF HOUSE

Unfortunately we arrived a little late owing to traffic so was unable to meet anyone from front of house. Luckily we did not miss the start of the show and just had enough time to purchase a programme and find our seats. I appreciated the efforts (including a couple of emails post my visit).

PROGRAMME

As always, the 36 page coloured programme was full of interesting articles and was of a very high standard indeed. The quality, use of fonts, photographs and colour were excellent. The biographies were interesting and the headshot photographs were clear.

Overall this was a very well rehearsed production that had authentic looking costumes & properties with excellent principal performances.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Bird'.

Gordon Bird
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