



Society : SLOUGH, WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD THEATRE COMPANY
Production : **TITANIC, The Musical**
Date : Thursday 1st November 2012
Venue : Theatre Royal, Windsor
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

I was pleased to be invited to watch *Titanic, the musical*, with lyrics and music written by Maury Yeston.

This is the first time I have seen the 1997 Broadway musical, a show that won five tony awards including best musical.

The SWMTC production was rather smoother than Titanic's voyage, with some lovely singing, imaginative choreographed movement and an impressive set. There were a few technical hitches on the evening I watched the show, but it did not distract from my overall enjoyment of this production.

Fortunately this story was not based on the commercially hyped film version that came onto our screens featuring Kate Winslet and Leonardo di Caprio but thankfully a more thoughtful interpretation. It followed the true stories of real people and rather than concentrate on one or two individuals, showed us a collective, making it more effective when we knew that they all had to face the disaster and some would live whilst other would not survive. The astonishing figures that were revealed at the end of the show were very moving.

The opening montage of pictures and newspaper captions were interesting and helped set the context of the show. I particularly liked the moment when the still photograph became a moving news reel from the period. This moved swiftly onto diagram drawings of the ship and into the opening scene. Clearly a lot of effort and imagination had been put into this collection and I thought it help set the scene superbly.

JULIA ANDERTON (Kate McGowan)

Kate is a woman who knows what she wants and how to get it. She is a third class passenger but knew how to get the most out of life, and managed to find herself her husband! I felt that Julia captured the character perfectly. The strong Irish accent was effective and you can be forgiven for only very occasionally in dropping the accent (I noticed the word "America", for instance). The singing was confident and very pleasant. Overall this was an assured performance from Julia.

HOWARD ELSON (Henry Etches)

This is a lovely character role and very well presented by Howard. Playing the character of a first class steward that clearly knew his place with his guests. There were some lovely delivery of lines too, including the moment when, as the liner was sinking, a discussion was taking place around the opening of a very expensive champagne – responding to the line "it is too good to open" with the lovely remark "it would be too good not to, sir". This summed up the character perfectly. Well done.

JOHN ASHER (Captain Smith)

John certainly looked the part of the liner's captain and performed his part with great sincerity. "*The Blame*" was very effectively sung and performed. Well done.

THOMAS ANDREWS (MATTHEW FILMORE)

Matthew had the responsibility of starting the show which he delivered confidently and wonderful singing. His characterisation was spot on – looking very much the ship designer and I enjoyed Matt's scene when he reveals that the ship will sink. This was a fine performance and excellent characterisation - well done.

EVE MACDONALD (Alice Beane)

This was a wonderful comic part that Eve sympathetically performed. It could so easily have been over acted but Eve managed to use the script and the characterisation work and the laughs were delivered perfectly. Her singing was first class, even though her "position" was only second! Well done.

STEVE MAPLEY (Bruce Ismay)

This was a wonderful pompous character that Steve superbly acted throughout the show. His singing was very well delivered and the song "*The blame*" was very well performed indeed.

LUKE WESTON (Barrett)

Luke has a magnificent singing voice and performed his songs with complete understanding. This was an excellent performance by Luke. Well done!

REECE YORK (Murdoch)

I have seen Reece in a couple of performances and once again he surprised me with a different characterisation, showing his versatility. His reaction on the realisation of the fate of the ship was very well portrayed.

CHORUS

The chorus worked very well as a unit and obviously well rehearsed. They knew the entrances and exits and clearly understood their characters, adding some realism to the production. The dance numbers were well rehearsed and effective, in particular the dining scene song ("*What a remarkable age this is*") and "*Doing the latest rag*".

DIRECTOR (MARK BOLKONSKY)

Mark had a clear vision of what was required and delivered. The moves were crisp and everyone knew their character and movement.

CHOREOGRAPHER (DAN WIGHTMAN)

I loved the movement for the dining room scene where the chairs came onto the set and equally and imaginatively disappeared. This looked simple but I should imagine took a lot of rehearsing to make it look so slick. There were not too many opportunities for dancing, however, when presented these looked well rehearsed and in keeping with the period.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR (GUY BUNCE)

Guy worked well with the orchestra to ensure the sound was nicely balanced with the performers. Although I did find some of the soloists difficult to hear, I think that was more of a sound issue rather than any musical direction. The chorus produced a lovely rounded sound and I thought all of the soloists performed very well. Well done.

STAGE MANAGER (ALICIA WALKER)

I felt the stage was well managed on the evening I watched so congratulations on Alicia and her stage crew.

LIGHTING (ANDY NICHOLSON)

Overall the lighting was effective and added to the show. However, there was clearly an issue with the lighting cues in the second act when there was an interesting selection of musical performers dotted around the set, each being lit for their solo pieces. This is quite complicated as the cues were thick and fast but I felt on the night I watched, the cues were late or missed that meant many of the soloists were in darkness or not lit on time. Perhaps a simpler lighting plot would have worked better or the opportunity of a little more practise. The lighting was certainly imaginative (using lighting through the gauze to reveal the passengers and crew for our first sight of the ship, the yellows and reds to represent the heat of the boiler room and the starry night) but required a little more assurance in performance.

SOUND (DAN HERBERT)

There were some issues with mics on the night I saw the performance which meant the sound was unequal. The song with the three Kate's was very unbalanced and I struggled to hear one of the Kates. The same issue was also true of the closing number where some singers were mic'd and others not. On the whole, the balance between the singers and orchestra was excellent and made it an audible delight.

PROPERTIES (MARGARET LYNCH & MARTYN PINNOCK)

The properties seemed appropriate for the period and production.

WARDROBE (ISABELLE FOLEY & LINDA LUCAS)

It is always difficult to find costumes for a period piece – and especially for a show that covers different social classes and uniforms. On the whole the costumes worked very well indeed – with some lovely effective costumes. The opening scenes where we saw the passengers and crew arrive, was clearly very well thought out with each of the classes wearing appropriate clothing for their social situation. I liked the blacks for the crew – immediately presenting them as different from everyone else. The only item I felt was not quite as authentic were the life jackets, they that looked rather flimsy (although that could be the effect that was deliberately trying to be presented).

HAIR (SAMANTHA BIFOLCO AND TEAM)

Well done to Samantha and her team as the hair styles looked in keeping with the period.

SET (ALISTAGE, MARTYN PINNOCK)

The show started with a montage of pictures and film reels and then revealed almost an open set with a passenger boarding ramp (down stage left) and a pile of luggage (down stage right). Once boarded,

the gauze revealed a three tier ship, showing the bridge, a middle passenger level and a lower, ground level. I liked the idea that these levels help represent the different social classes (the lower level often being used for the third class or the crew). The set looked very well constructed and imaginatively used.

PROGRAMME

The 32 page coloured programme was priced at £3. It contained some lovely photographs, historical facts about the ocean liner, cast introductions and photographs. The programme was excellently produced and an interesting read.

I enjoyed my first voyage on *Titanic the musical* and look forward to the next production.

Gordon Bird
NODA representative
London Region, District 14