



Society : SLOUGH, WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD THEATRE COMPANY
Production : **THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK**
Date : Friday 2nd August 2013
Venue : Theatre Royal Windsor
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

I have not seen this musical before and have not even see the 1987 film that featured Jack Nicholson and Cher; so I was delighted to be invited to see the Friday night performance of *The Witches of Eastwick*. The musical, adapted by John Dempsey and music by Dana P Rowe, is based on a novel by John Updike and first premiered at the Theatre Royal, Dury Lane in London on 18th July 2000.

The story follows three bored and frustrated Rhodes Island women who conjure up their ideal man. When he arrives and seduces each of them, he teaches how to release powers that are locked within each of them but they soon start to have second thoughts.

This production as brilliantly performed by the cast and held my attention throughout. It was excellently cast and each member performed superbly. The chorus work was some of the best I have witnessed by this group.

Darryl Van Horne (DAMIAN SOLLESSE)

I have seen Damian several times over the years performing a variety of roles for different societies but this is by far his best to date. He was outstanding as the devilish Darryl. His mannerisms were exact for this character, played just slightly exaggerated which meant we could not take him too seriously. It was delivered perfectly. Damian has a fine voice, and all his songs were performed with confidence and accuracy. But it was his acting of this character that truly lifted this part above all the others I have witnessed. Well done on an excellent performance.

Alexandra Spofford (LORNA PEARSON-HALL)

Jane Smart (ANDREA TUSHINGHAM)

Sukie Rougmount (SIAN MARSHALL)

I have grouped the three witches together because most of my comments relate to all of them. They each gave a superb performance. Their individual characters were very well defined, straight from the opening number, for example, I could see that Jane was a school teacher. They quite often sung together and their voices blended superbly, with wonderful harmonies. But as individuals they also sung exceptionally well. The three "seduction" scenes in act one, were each acted brilliantly. Each of you understood the characters, reacted to the seduction truthfully, and reacted brilliantly to outrageous Darryl. But of course the highlight must be the flying scene at the end of act one. Even though I do not know the show, I was aware of this piece of theatre and was curious a) how this was going to be achieved and b) how the actresses would react. I have to say that you all reacted magnificently. I was impressed that you each handled being lifted into the air very naturally! And even had a little choreographed movement! It is very difficult to separate out these three outstanding performances by three very skilled performers. Well done to each of you.

Felicia Gabriel (DEBBIE CHRISTIE)

Debbie performed the antagonist of the piece very well indeed. As the self appointed head of the town of Eastwick, Felicia took an instant dislike to Darryl and was determined to block planning changes. She also attempted in persuading public opinion. Debbie mastered the role expertly, looking like public leader (touches of a certain Margaret Thatcher I felt, but maybe that was the blue suit and handbag that gave that view). She controlled her scenes well and there was a good understanding with Mr Gabriel. But this character also had its moments of comedy (the production of the eggs was very well presented). Overall this was a very good character performance by Debbie.

Jennifer Gabriel (SHONA NOLAN)

Gabriel's daughter, Jennifer, is portrayed as an innocent teenager, acting as a contrast to her mother's self importance and to the selfish conduct of the "witches". And when Jennifer is finally seduced in Act 2 by Darryl, it provides the catalyst for the finale. Shona performed this role superbly well, understanding the character perfectly so that the seduction in act 2 was a shock. Her singing throughout was wonderful.

Michael Spofford (ADAM LEAKE)

Adam cleverly played enough of the geek without going over the top. We could see his awkwardness and vulnerability rather than an out and out geek that would not have worked. He worked very well with Shona and we believed in the love between your characters.

Clyde Gabriel (AUSTIN MARSHALL)

This was a very different performance from the one I last saw Austin in *The Producers*, which goes to show his versatility as a performer. As Clyde he played Felicia's henpecked husband and Sukie's lover. He performed the role exceptionally well and his final scene when we see him kill his wife was a surprise but very well performed.

Little Girl (TILLY ROSE MITCHELL)

Not quite sure what this part had to do with the show, but Tilly played the "Little Girl", who sweetly started the show and popped up every now and again with a few lines of song, or handed a prop to Darryl, with perfect timing and ease.

Fidel (MATTHEW FILMORE)

There cannot be that many roles that have just one line yet receive so much laughter. Every time Matthew came on stage as Darryl's man servant, he received a laugh. His mannerisms, and especially his walk, were excellent. And of course when he finally delivered his line towards the end of the show, was timed to perfection. A wonderful cameo role.

ENSEMBLE

The chorus were superb in this show. They each had a character that was clearly defined and maintained. From the opening number, *Eastwick Knows*, they had energy and purpose. I have always been impressed with chorus at SWMTC but this time they excelled themselves. I thought all the dance numbers were well presented, with everyone knowing what they were doing. Entrances and exits were clearly defined and executed. There was a sense of a company here, with everyone working well together. Even when someone came in early on *Dirty Laundry (Reprise)*, the chorus simply carried on as if nothing had happened. No-one looking around, no accusing glances given, no apology needed –

they just simply continued as one. This shows the sign of a very well disciplined group and emphasises their skill that is rarely seen on the amateur stage.

Director & Choreographer (SIMON WOODBRIDGE)

Simon can be congratulated on an excellent show. I was impressed with the clear direction with all entrances and exits very well rehearsed. All the choreography was enjoyable (by both cast and audience alike).

Musical Director (PETER DODSWORTH)

There was lovely controlled balance between orchestra and singers, as well as the singers themselves. Clearly the performers were well directed as all of the singers were excellent and complimented each other very well indeed.

Stage management (ALICIA WALKER)

Overall the stage was expertly managed by Alicia, with slick scene changes that kept the pace of the show moving along very well. I do have to comment on the sight lines, where I could not only see the smoke machine stage right, but also saw the stage hand. It was a shame that the device could not have been hidden, perhaps locating behind the flat (or even moving the flat back several inches?)

Set Design

There were a good range of very well prepared backdrops that added depth to the scenes. The set looked very well constructed and thought had been given how to ensure scene changes would be quickly set, as many of the items were on wheels.

Sound (DAN HERBERT)

The sound was very well balanced and I heard every word from the cast and felt the balance between the orchestra and performers was spot on.

Lighting (ANDY NICHOLSON)

I always enjoy Andy's lighting plots, as I was not disappointed during this show. The range of colours displayed on the cyclorama were varied and interesting. The opening numbers displayed a range of plum reds and blues to purples and then to golden yellows. All of the songs had their own unique and interesting plot, sometimes with different range of colours, sometimes with tight spots for the soloists. The lighting effects were enhanced with some of the drops, one in particular with lovely night blues revealing a starry night sky and moon. Some of the cues were a little late (in Dirty Laundry, I think it was) and some of the actors not finding their spot and were not lit appropriately. This is more for the actress in question rather than lighting (as you cannot do much about it) so it just needs the cast to know exactly where they need to stand (and make sure they keep to it). Overall, Andy once again delivered a wonderfully interesting lighting plot.

Wardrobe

The costumes were all very well sourced. They seemed appropriate to the era and thought had been given to match the characters. In particular, the range of attire for the Witches was superb. The character parts were enhanced by some good costumes too, clearly well thought out.

Properties (MARGARET LYNCH & MARTYN PINNOCK)

The properties all looked perfect for the period (1960s) and its American location. All the props were in place and on time and I was not aware of any hitches.

Makeup

All of the makeup was ably applied and could be seen under the range of lighting effects.

Front of house

There was a huge queue to pick up tickets, which was pleasing to see for the production and I hope that many of these were walk ins. However, this did mean I had to wait quite a while before my tickets were located and handed to me. I have to thank Matthew Filmore for doubling up his part with greeting me on my arrival, ensuring that I had a programme.

Programme

The 28 page programme was once again excellently produced – with interesting articles (about the history of the show and its transformation from screen to stage and the author, John Updike). The use of photographs and graphics were superbly used. Interesting biographies of the principals also had very clear head shot photographs.

Overall, this was an excellent production and one that I wished I could have seen again. I look forward to the next performance later in the year.



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