



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Starmaker Youth Theatre Company
Production : In the Heights
Date : Friday 5th October 2018
Venue : Wilde Theatre - Bracknell
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

I have to admit to knowing nothing about this show other than it was written by the same guy that did the hit "Hamilton".

I was pleasantly surprised to find it had a great lib and score and characters that had depth and intensity. There were some super performances from the cast and the whole piece was dynamic lively and energetic.

Elsie Wood-Blagrove – (Usnavi) – To portray a young male character and display the required emotions as well as this young actress did is nothing short of brilliant! Her dialogue and visuals were vivid and animated; and her rapping superb with clarity of diction that was superlative. Her scene after the death of Abuela was totally believable and how mature was that "Kiss".

Millie Johnson – (Nina) – This was a skilfully acted performance with visuals and movement being lively and peppy. The rapport created with Benny was mature and realistic. When singing in her lower register this young lady has a super mellow voice which resonated real depth and feeling; being most apparent in her delightful rendition of "Everything I Know". However I found her upper register rather harsh; which could be attributed to the sound which needed turning down a notch or two.

Robyn Warrick-Clarke – (Vanessa) – As Usnavi's love interest this young lady had developed a sassy and confident character; displaying real affection toward him. They worked well together creating a great chemistry; meaning the "kiss" was natural and confident. Although I would have liked more expressive facial expressions her dialogue was vivid and striking; as was the delivery of her lyrics in all her numbers but none more so than "Champagne" which was well sung.

Harley Emmitt – (Benny) – I so enjoyed everything about this young man's performance. His acting was absolutely first rate; his dialogue clear and audible with great intonation and his movement lithe and fluid. For me he had the best singing voice of the evening and all his numbers were put over in character and sublimely tuneful and melodic. "Sunrise" was particularly poignant.

Matilda Lawrence – (Sonny) – This young lady gave a good account of herself! Having to act and move like a young man is quite a challenge and she achieved this with comparative ease. Her dialogue was well delivered with a creditable accent and her part in the musical numbers was confident assured and well-articulated.

Evie Sonehouse – (Abuela) – What a knockout performance this was! To portray an older character it requires understanding of the dialogue; manner of deportment and thoughtful relationships. This young lady had a superb characterisation and made the role her own. Her dialogue and movement were unparalleled and her relationship with Unsavi warm and caring. She has a smooth and refined singing voice and her rendition of “Patience and Faith” was a sheer delight.

Molly Barnett – (Daniella) – This young lady had a sassy and dynamic personality and gave a terrific performance. Her dialogue was vital and lively as were her facial expressions. Movement and singing had real attitude which was perfect for the character. The relationships she forged with Carla and Vanessa were natural and emotive. “No me Digga” was brash and energetic.

Jessica Hilton-Owen – (Carla) – As Daniella’s best friend this young actress made the perfect foil. She was delightfully ditzzy and her dialogue reflected this perfectly. Her part in “No me Digga” had a real sense of fun and plenty of pizzazz.

Corey Aberly – (Kevin) – This was a highly charged in depth characterisation. His proud overprotective persona came over fabulously and although his diction was not always totally clear he delivered his dialogue with feeling and passion. He had built great rapport with Camila and his relationship with Nina controlling and dictatorial. His rendition of “Inútil” was stirring and impassioned.

Hannah Day – (Camila) – As the strong willed and tolerant wife this young actress had the character off to a T. Her relationships with Kevin and Nina were well depicted and I liked the way her own personality developed as the show went on. Her dialogue was strong and powerful and her singing intense and effective. A really well sung “Enough”

Johnny Coombes – (Graffiti Pete) – This young man was delightfully cheeky cocky and self-assured. He smiled constantly and was clearly enjoying every minute. Due to the speed he delivered his dialogue I was not always able to understand what he was saying; however this can be forgiven. He is quite the little mover and I really enjoyed watching his energetic antics.

Alex Hutson – (Piragüero) – This was a funny convivial and entertaining performance. Dialogue was well delivered and his “Piragüero” humorously sung with great diction and projection.

Seth Macleod – (José) **Hayley Crofts** - (Yolanda) – These two young actors completed the line-up of named principals; they were great to watch and performed their given roles with panache and aplomb.

Ensemble – This group were superb they gave their absolute all in every action and number they executed. Their vigour and energy was magnificent and they sang and danced with enthusiasm and spirit.

Matthew Harcourt/Amelia Dorey – (Co-Directors) – These two clearly had the same vision and worked toward that goal. They had given the cast direction and guidance with their characters that worked brilliantly with the relationships therein honest open and tangible. To

get Usnavi and Vanessa to kiss like that without feeling embarrassed was a real accomplishment. Staging was good with a great use of the upper level although this did rather disembodiment the actors. I do question the movement of the stairs which was cumbersome and did not add anything to the plot. However I loved the blackout scene with cast using torches to great effect. The scenes ran smoothly from one to the next giving the action pace and drive. All in all this was a wonderfully creative production and one of which they should be extremely proud.

Matthew Harcourt – (Musical Director) – Once again this young man extracted the very best from his principals and chorus. Timing entrances harmonies and dynamics were all superb. On the whole the balance between pit and stage was perfect; however whether it was because I was sat in the upper tier and the sound travelled up there were occasions when the band overpowered the singers.

Jenna Ellis – (Choreographer) – assisted by **Kitty Pilgrim-Morris** I liked every routine this choreographer had devised. Some were simple yet effective enabling every cast member to perform with confidence and others more intricate for the advanced students. For the most part the cast were tight and uniform; however there were a couple of times when they appeared a little ragged and out of sync. That said every number had energy and vitality and the cast performed them with enthusiasm

Alan Smith – (Production Consultant) – I'm sure this chap was on hand to give assistance wherever it was required. He had clearly ensured every aspect of the production came together perfectly so the whole ran seamlessly from start to finish.

Alistair McKay – (Stage Manager) – assisted by **Keith Baker/Lesley Pearson** – ASM's and **Michelle Palin** – DSM – Having a static set for the duration of the show meant this team had little to do. However with the children moving the steps there is always a risk and it is imperative to have qualified technicians on hand just in case. They also insured the children got on and off stage safely.

Rebecca Simons – (Lighting Design) – programmed and operated by **Louis Martin** - this lighting design had been well thought through and the technician operating it cued everything perfectly. There was some lovely warm all over lighting and atmospheric lighting when the blackout occurred. There was an excellent use of spotlights operated by **Stuart Brookfield/Mike Quirke** giving a real feeling of intimacy.

Matthew Harcourt – (Projection/Set Design) – I really liked the projection of the Washington Bridge which gave added depth and dimension to the stage. The three pieces of set depicting Rosario's cabs, Usnavi's bodega and Daniela's salon (presumably hired from **Kristian Thomas Company**) had been well positioned to maximise the acting area and the use of the steps either side for the cast to gain access to the acting area on the top was a clever addition.

Tom Horrox – (Sound Designer/Operator) – I usually find the sound in this venue to be of a high standard. However on this occasion I found it was rather too loud and some of the voices suffered from this sounding harsh and screechy.

Luana Caratelli – (Costume Administrator) – with costumes from **Starmaker Costume Hire**
This young lady had co-ordinated the costumes perfectly. I liked the way she had chosen clothes to suit the personality of the actor as well as being apt for the character. I was a little concerned that Vanessa's red dress was a tad too short for stage purposes; it is always wise to look at these things from an audience point of view.

Valentina Britten Holden – (Properties) – These had been well collated and were all suitable for their purpose. The ghetto blaster and cab microphone were great and all those torches!

Luana Caratelli – (Hair/Makeup Supervisor) – This young lady had done a grand job with ensuring the youngsters had makeup that suited their youthful skin yet enhanced and defined their features. Hair looked super and I was pleased to note that no one had a fringe or stray hair that covered their face. I liked the way Usnavi and Sonny had their hair tied back in order to create the illusion of a male character.

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13