

NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION LONDON REGION

Society ; **Starmaker Theatre Company**
Production ; **"LES MISERABLES"**
Date ; **Thursday 7th March 2013**
Venue ; **Wilde Theatre, Bracknell**
Report by ; **Henry Hawes – NODA Representative – Area 13**

On Thursday 7th March 2013, I had the pleasure of being invited to review Starmaker's latest production "*Les Miserables*" at the Wilde Theatre in Bracknell. I have always been a devotee of this show since it was first presented some 26 years ago. It is a show that displays all the human emotions coupled with an exciting music score. This young company presented the School Edition of this show, and what a show. It had been brilliantly staged and cast and I sat entranced throughout the whole of the production.

Matthew Harcourt – (VALJEAN) – I first reviewed Matthew in Starmaker's last show "*Pirates of Penzance*" when he played 'The Pirate King' being his first role ever. I was most impressed, not only with his acting ability but his comedy timing and outstanding singing voice, so when I saw he was playing the title role in 'Les Miserables' I was interested to see if he could extend his repertoire in the role of 'Valjean' requiring an entirely different acting and singing ability. My fears were soon put to rest; Matthew gave a superlative performance, immersing himself completely into the character. This is a demanding role being on stage virtually the whole time and having to sing some 10 difficult numbers including that haunting number "*Bring Him Home*" which he delivered to perfection – This was a show stopping performance – Congratulations.

David Wallace – (JAVERT) – This young man may be small in stature but very big in talent with a big voice. As the fanatic Police Inspector intent on pursuing 'Valjean' with such intensity that it eventually destroys him, David gave a great interpretation of this role and commanded the stage whenever he appeared. In his numerous musical numbers he used his excellent bass/baritone voice to good effect; his lower register is a delight to listen too which is unusual in such a young person – Very well done.

Zoe Longhurst – (FANTINE) – As the beautiful Parisian who has fallen on hard times with an illegitimate daughter, Zoe was well cast. This is quite a dramatic role having lost her job at the factory and then having to sell her hair and turn to prostitution to feed her daughter and who subsequently dies, requires a consummate actress which Zoe was. Her singing of "*I Dreamed a Dream*" was beautifully delivered bringing out all the fear and pathos – Well done.

Henry Bearman – (MARIUS) – As the law student who falls in love with 'Cosette' Henry got the part just right, he exhibited his passion for the students revolt and at the same time portrayed his love for 'Cosette'. His acting ability was good ensuring the character was

displayed correctly. He exhibited a good high baritone voice, the trio *"A Heart Full Of Love"* with 'Cosette' and 'Eponine' was a delight with good phrasing and balance of voices. He also came to the fore in the number *"Empty Chairs at Empty Tables"* bringing out all the feeling and despair in this number – Well done.

Ashleigh Payne – (COSETTE) – As the illegitimate daughter of 'Fantine' brought up by 'Valjean' after her mother's death, Ashleigh got the character just right. Her love for 'Marius' and the loss of her adopted father 'Valjean' were all well displayed. Her superb soprano voice came to the fore in such numbers as *"In My Life"*, *"A Heart Full of Love"* and *"Every Day"* – Great – Congratulations.

Noella Doran – (EPONINE) – I always think that this must be a lovely character to play, but it must be played by an actress who can both act and sing and show all the passion and despair required for the part and this we had with Noella. 'Eponine' is a street urchin in Paris who falls in love with 'Marius' from a distance realising that her love cannot be fulfilled. This character has one of the better songs to sing in the overall show *"On My Own"* bringing out all the passion and despair which was beautifully sung by Noella – This was a finely crafted role – Congratulations.

Matthew Snape – (THENARDIERS)

Rachel Warrick-Clarke – (Mme THENARDIER) – It is essential that these two are well cast and characterised as they bring an element of humour into the musical, which is essential. Both Rachel and Matthew were superb as the grasping, petty thieving owner of a small inn and who are involved with any scheme that will turn a profit entering fully into the spirit of the characters. The well known number *"Master of the House"*, was very well sung with Matthews's baritone voice blending well with Rachel's Contralto – Congratulations.

Robyn Warrick-Clarke & Jodie Bishop – (LITTLE COSETTE) – It is unfortunate that I can only review one character when two are cast in the same role as required by regulations, that said, from the standard displayed on the night of my visit, both must have given a good performance. Robyn was performing on my visit and I was impressed with her acting when put upon by the 'Thenardiens' and her song *"Castle on a Cloud"* was beautifully sung – Well done.

Ben Lewis & Alex Kitching – (GAVROCHE) – The same applied with this character as it did with 'Little Cosette' and on the night of my visit Ben was in 'the hot seat'. As the street urchin who gets shot at the barricade after revealing 'Javert' was a spy. He had all the cheekiness required for the role with some excellent facial expressions and his singing of *"Little People"* was well sung – Well done.

Lee Simmonds – (ENJOLRAS) – This character has to have impact as the leader of the Students and who arranges and mans the barricade. His songs with Marius, Students and Citizens which gave full rein to his baritone voice and which raised the fighting spirit of the students etc; - This was a well acted and sung character – Well done.

Josh Gwilt – (BISHOP)
Paige Foote – (YOUNG EPONINE)
Ben Tait – (COMBEFERRE)
Jacob Smith – (FEUILLY)
Austin Grigoleit - (COURFEYRAC)
Nathan Isaac – (JOLY)
Josh Gwilt – (GRANTAIRE)
Ashley Wilson – (PROUVAIRE)
Max Jefcut – (LESGLES)
Callum Hopcutt – (MONTPARNASSE)
Joe Wilson – (BABET)
John Ralls – (BRUJON)
Bruce Williams – (CLAQUESOUS)
Jack Jennings – (PIMP/STUDENT)
Max Mander – (STUDENT)
Bonita Trigg – (OLD WOMAN)) – In this musical there are many minor roles and it is impossible to report on each and every individual, so I have combined these minor roles together, which does not mean to say that your performances were not of a high standard, because they were. Each and everyone entered into the spirit of this production faithfully depicting all the various characters – I congratulate you all

ENSEMBLE

Tammy Birch, Thomas Brown, Jade Chaplin, Sarah Coward, Naomi Doran, Amelia Dorey, Will Fieldhouse, Freya Foster, Emily Grigoleit, Safforn Harrington, Gabi Harris, Beckie Herbert, Sophie Harvey, Phoebe Jackson, Max Jefcut, Leslie Machin, Katie Mitchell, Jasmine Noel, Alex Ramchand, Ariel Ramchand, Lili Reakes, Stephanie Ridge, Libby Sinclair, Charlotte Snape, Liyah Thompson, Rianne Thompson, Hollie Watts, Beth Wright – This ensemble was quite terrific, they filled the stage with disciplined movement with each one presenting individual characters and entering into the spirit of the musical. The singing from this group was impressive with a good balance of voices, volume and projection. The acting from this group was also impressive – Well done to all of you.

Dave Savage – (DIRECTOR)
Ben Smith - (ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR & ASSISTANT MD)
Emily Smith – (DIRECTOR'S ASSISTANT) – **Dave Savage** together with the support of **Ben Smith** and **Emily Smith** presented a superb production of this musical. The large cast of some 54 members had been well rehearsed, no easy task with a show of this stature. All the principals had been well selected and some excellent characterisations brought out. I could not fault the staging and movements with everybody being in the right place at the right time. The director had brought out all the drama and tragedy inherent in the script and clearly displayed the conditions in Paris in the 1820's/30's - Brilliant

Anton Gwilt – (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) – Anton had gathered together some 17 excellent musicians to which he brought exemplary control ensuring all the drama and pathos contained in the score was brought out. I imagine an enormous amount of rehearsal time had been spent in ensuring the cast were well versed in the music, as it showed. Here we

had a cast who sang with precision, control and balance of a difficult score and was certainly comparable to what I have listened too before in other productions – Congratulations.

Stage Managers & Crew – The Stage Manager and Crew under the direction of **Alistair McKay** certainly ensured that the show had a good flow with swift, silent scene changes.

Lighting Design and Operation – A first-class lighting design by **Rebecca Simons** ensured that the right atmosphere was generated in the various scenes so that all the drama was brought out. Operation on the night of my visit by **Darcey Harrington** could not be faulted with well picked up cues.

Follow Spot and Spotlight Operators – The operation of the various spotlights by the pair of **Erik Haxhilari** and **Kim Hollamby** was well controlled and focussed.

Sound – The sound design by **Brett Smith** and assistants **Julie & Jenny Slevin** was well balanced and the control of the individual mics was good with well picked up cues. I did have a feeling however, that on the odd occasion, it was slightly over-amplified and was a little over-powering to the voices on stage.

Props – **Jenny Green** was responsible for sourcing the various props used in the production. They looked authentic fitting the period and the action on stage.

Costumes – The costume design by **Glynis Smith** and her team of **Cathie Savage, Jenny Green** and **Marilyn Baker** had amassed a wonderful set of costumes, all completed in house, an enormous challenge, but it was certainly worth it as the whole cast was beautifully dressed in the period of the time – Congratulations.

Scenery – The set supplied by **Scenic Projects** and cloths by **Border Studio** looked good on stage. They appeared clean and well painted and were an integral part of this excellent production.

Make-up – Although no one was listed in the programme as being responsible for the make-up, I felt that I had to report, that whoever was responsible did an excellent job, especially for the main characters – Well done.

Programme – An excellent programme of the right size. It contained a wealth of information with good cast photographs and biographies. The graphics was of a high quality with an eye-catching cover and all printed on good quality paper. Thank you for the article on NODA – Just one small point – NODA have moved to a new address since Christmas and is now situated at 15, The Metro Centre, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire PE2 7UH. Email info@noda.org.uk. Tel; 01733 374790. Fax; 01733 237286 (It shows I read the programme!)

Front of House – One can always rely on Starmaker to ensure Front of House staff is easily identifiable, smart and helpful to their audience – Keep up the good work.

Thank you for inviting me to review your latest production “*Les Miserable’s*” and congratulations to all concerned on a fine production. A fitting show to celebrate your 25th

Anniversary and I look forward to your next two production celebrating your 25 years, “*Cats*” and “*Miss Saigon*” and wish you every success.

Henry

NODA Regional Representative – London Region – Area 13