

Society : **Starmaker Theatre Company**
Production : **Hairspray**
Date : **Friday 4th March**
Venue : **Wilde Theatre – Bracknell**
Report by : **Jeanette Maskell**

Show Report

I was delighted to be invited to review the latest offering from this young talented society.

Although Hairspray has an underlying message of racial issues; it is nonetheless a dynamic upbeat fun show with lots of characters and one which suited this group immensely.

Emily Hawkes – (Tracey Turnblad) – Here is a young lady destined to go far. She had a glowing radiance and sparkled from start to finish. Her dialogue contained all the right inflection and was delivered with clarity of diction a good well maintained accent and excellent projection. (It was just unfortunate that she did not feel entirely comfortable with her wig) All her numbers were put over in character with great vocals and visuals but “I can hear the Bells” and “Without Love” were particular favourites of mine!

Henry Bearman – (Corny Collins) – I’m sure this young man can use his acting talents to play any role he wants. When on camera he was self-assured playing to the audience with wonderful cheesy facial expressions that reminded me greatly of Hughie Greene. When delivering dialogue off camera he gave an honest and grounded performance that was totally believable. His singing and movement were of the highest order culminating in a prodigious portrayal. I particularly enjoyed his rendition of “The Nicest Kids in Town”

Joe Wilson – (Edna) – This young man gave the performance of the evening; he really was outstanding! He has a natural ability for comedy and his timing was faultless. His dialogue was delivered with great diction and projection containing a multitude of light and shade. Interaction with his fellow actors was spot on with movement being agile and nimble. I was very impressed with the way he manipulated proceedings when things went awry; something a lot of seasoned actors would find a challenge. His “Timeless to Me” was sung and acted with bounce and vitality one of the highlights of the evening.

Rosie Sumner – (Penny Pingleton) – I really enjoyed this young ladies ditsy performance. She had just the right amount of dizziness and airheaded eccentricity at no time going too far. Her interaction with everyone around her was first rate and the rapport between her and Tracey created a genuine “BFF” impression. Dialogue was clear and fresh with great inflexion. Her singing was strong and coherent and she put over all her numbers in character. I really enjoyed her duet with Seaweed which was amusing and easy going.

Natalie Cox – (Velma Von Tussle) – As Amber’s pushy mother and villainess of the piece this young lady was superb. She was visually animated carried herself with a self-assured effortless gait and completed the characterisation with some super hand gestures. Her

dialogue was clear well projected with great intonation; and her singing superlative with “Miss Baltimore Crabs” being a real delight.

Phoebe Jackson – (Amber Von Tussle) – What a deliciously bitchy bratty and skillful performance we witnessed from this accomplished actress! She looked every bit the part moving with fluid agility and delivering her dialogue with energy and varied dynamics. “Cooties” was well sung with real passion.

Jacob Marshall – (Link Larkin) – After a hesitant start he settled into a nicely delineated portrayal of the young council member heartthrob. His dialogue movement and singing were all of the highest order and his relationship with Tracey developed artistically throughout culminating in a well sung “Without You”

Ajani Case – (Seaweed J Stubbs) – This young man gave a laid back yet lively entertaining performance. His natural rhythm played to his strength in his vocals and movement. His dialogue was refreshingly spirited with super diction and projection. I really liked the chemistry that evolved between him and Penny it was playful fun and entirely believable.

Katie Weller – (Little Inez) – I was very impressed with this young lady’s mature performance. She had pep drive and enthusiasm, which enhanced her character fully. Her dialogue was well delivered and she sang and moved with alacrity.

Siobhan White – (Motormouth Maybelle) – This young lady really came into her own during her song “I Know Where I’ve Been” which was sung with great feeling intensity and fervour.

Nathan Isaac – (Wilbur Turnblad/Gym Mistress) – In his cameo as the gym mistress he displayed an inept authoritative character that came over very well. As Wilbur he created an ineffectual homely father figure; with good delivery of dialogue and lithe movement. His relationship with Edna and Tracey was well defined and intuitive. His duet with Edna was well sung with a real sense of fun.

Saffron Harrington – (Prudy Pingleton) – This young lady has a natural talent for comedy her performance was engaging and charismatic; her dialogue was exceptional and she was a tour de force in “Mama I’m a Big Girl Now”.

Seth Macleod – (Mr. Pinky) – Here is a young man that understands comedy! He gave a spirited performance creating a humorous aptly over the top character. His dialogue was strong and his movement flamboyant which complemented his portrayal.

Ed Scott - (Harriman F Spritzer) – This was an accomplished performance with well delivered dialogue containing all the right inflection. I enjoyed the diversity of his character; he was friendly, flustered, charming, and forceful.

Freya Foster – (Matron) – This young talented actress is a joy to watch. She has a delightfully vivacious smile and delivers her dialogue with clarity and energy. She looks captivating and moves with fluidity. Her singing of “The Big Doll House” was terrific!

Detention Kids - This group worked well as a team; they were noisy and vivacious supporting Seaweed with energetic enthusiasm.

Council Members – (Corny Collins Kids) – These twelve youngsters were absolutely superb! Their movement was completely in character with the period and each move performed in total sync. They smiled throughout giving a joyful and upbeat quality to their singing which was delivered with zingy pizzazz.

Katherine Hay
Connie Wheeler

Freya Foster – (The Dynamites) – These three young ladies were delightful; they were lively animated and full of life. They moved with a lithe graceful agility and their singing was superlative with some super harmonies.

Lucy Turner – (Beatnik Chick)

Will Fieldhouse – (Guard) – These two youngsters played their parts well supporting the cast in the scenes in which they were involved.

Ensemble – The ensemble were dazzling they shone from start to finish. They moved and sang confidently with energy and enthusiasm supporting the main cast. Their entrances and exits were well executed with no queuing.

Emily Smith – (Director) – Assisted by **Sophie Elliott** - This was an exceptionally well directed piece of theatre; however some members of the group still need more direction with timing; as some dialogue was spoken over laughter or applause. I also noted that certain cast members chose to deliver dialogue and song to the audience when they needed to be interacting with their fellow performers. These are just a couple of pointers; however they did not in anyway detract from the overall brilliance of the show. It was clear how much work had been put into producing some exceptional principal characterisations giving them insight and confidence. Staging blocking and groupings were faultless creating a great visual effect which was easy on the eye. There were some delightful touches throughout with great use of entrances through the auditorium keeping the momentum going. The piece had been superbly stylized which had great pace and a vibrant energy.

Ellie Verkerk – (Musical Director) – I am a great fan of this young lady; she certainly knows how to get the best out of the performers. She had worked on diction which was excellent, entrances and timing which was faultless and understanding the meaning of the lyrics. There were a couple of breathing issues, which I believe is probably due to the speed at which some of the numbers were taken. However she kept a tight reign on the band which accompanied the group sympathetically; although as stated below in the first half the singers were rather overpowered by them.

Michelle Legg – (Choreographer) – The choreography for this performance was absolutely first rate; it was original contemporary and full of fun, whilst fitting with period completely. She had drilled the cast to perfection ably assisted by a competent **Daisy Mai**. I was particularly impressed with “Welcome to the Sixties” and of course “You Can’t Stop the Beat”

David Parsonson – (Production Manager) – Here is a gentleman that works tirelessly for the amateur theatre. In this instance he had brought together all aspects of stage and performance to provide the group with the smooth running of the production.

Alistair McKay – (Stage Manager) – This was a large set supplied by Scenic Projects requiring numerous changes of scene; however it was well-run with changes being made quickly quietly and efficiently.

Michelle Palin/Mike Quirk/Keith Baker – (DSM/ASM's) – These three worked well with the SM to provide the fluency required to ensure the pace of the piece didn't dip at any time.

Samuel Tait – (Lighting Design/Operator) – This was an excellent lighting plot which was expertly operated. **Becca Simons** the Lighting Supervisor obviously had good overall control which benefitted the performance. There was an excellent use of spot lights operated by **Louis Martin/Stuart Brookfield**

Tom Horrox – (Sound Design/Operation) – assisted by **Rhi O'Keefe/Austen Grigoleit** – On the evening of my visit the sound team had a bit of mare! There were missed cues, sound effects that went off early and some that went of late and the balance between pit and stage in the first half meant the band drowned the singers. This was redressed in the second half; however the mic's were so high that some of the dialogue and songs became distorted. I'm sure this was rectified for the remaining performances.

Jessica Costellow – (Properties) – assisted by Chelsea Fairley – These had been gathered according to the period and there was nothing to cause the performers concern.

Cathy Savage/Glynis Smith/Starmaker Costume Hire – (Costumes) – These looked fresh and bright befitting each character perfectly and shoes were acceptable for the period. Were costumes also responsible for wigs? Mr. Pinky and Amber's were not of the highest quality which was such a shame for the two young performers.

Jo Stringer – (Make-up Design) – assisted by Friends and Parents of Starmaker – This had been well applied enabling the audience to see the features of each individual and not disappearing under the lights.

Thank you for looking after me so well

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13