



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Starmaker
Production : 13
Date : 25/03/23
Venue : Alan Cornish Theatre, The Oakwood Centre, Woodley
Reviewer : Cate Naylor

Show Report

Thank you for inviting me to your production of '13 The Musical'. As your chairman said, it was rather neat that that you currently have 13 members! '13' follows 12-year old Evan Goldman who moves from his New York City life to the sleepy Indiana town of Appleton following his parent's divorce. Surrounded by a group of new middle school students, he needs to establish his place in the popularity pecking order and prepare for his impending Bar Mitzvah.

Cast

Oliver Widdis (Evan) gave a confident performance in the demanding central role of Evan. His acting performance and characterisation as the insecure Jewish kid who wanted to be popular whatever the cost was excellent. He clearly communicated that the decisions that you make affect the people around you and that owning up to your bad actions is always the best course of action. Oliver had a powerful singing voice and delivered his many songs with emotion and feeling. He had good stage presence and interacted very well with the other cast members.

Rita Santana (Patrice) gave a standout performance. Her characterisation of the intelligent socially conscious school outcast was perfectly portrayed. Her acting was thoughtful and measured but communicated volumes. She had a natural singing voice, and her musicality was excellent. She demonstrated superb vocal control for such a young singer and over a wide range. She was extremely expressive with moments of power contrasted with much more tender moments portraying the range of different emotions exquisitely.

Max Davison (Archie) as Patrice's special needs friend, Max used his comedic timing very well with just enough underlying pathos in the complex role to show Archie's uniqueness perfectly. He was able

to laugh at himself whilst wishing he was more popular and communicated his major crush on Kendra really well. He sang confidently, and with a good voice.

Oliver Milligan (Brett) played the most popular boy in the school with great characterisation. He portrayed Brett as a vain bully, full of himself, and confident that the pack of wannabe popular boys would follow his lead. He had good facial expressions which he used in some lovely comedic moments. His expressions and comic timing when he was writing the words of the song “Tell Her” on his arm and legs were hilarious. He had a strong singing voice but was a little less assured in some sections of the music.

Florence Wood-Blagrove (Lucy) was perfect as the smart and manipulative cheerleader; she was feisty, scheming, and shallow - the classic ‘mean girl’. Supposedly Kendra’s best friend, she secretly desired to have her "friend" Kendra's boyfriend Brett for herself. Florence sang well and I enjoyed her song “Opportunity”. Her movement and dancing was precise and natural.

Ami-Jane Jackson (Kendra) was faultless in her portrayal of Kendra (every boy’s crush). She was exceptionally nice but naïve and impressionable, being led on by Brett and Lucy. She was an accomplished dancer who impressed with her dance moves, her ‘en pointe’ ballet dancing and her gymnastic moves. She sang with a clear expressive voice.

Ellie Burman (Cassie) a cheerleader friend of Lucy was confident on stage, playing Cassie as a fashion forward teenager who was very image conscious. She danced very well joining the other cheerleaders in some energetic dance routines. Her solo at the finale was excellent and she sang with style, and great dynamics.

Ari Watts (Molly) and **Jess Hilling** (Charlotte) played two other gossipy cheerleaders who were friends with Lucy and Kendra. They danced and sang well, participating proficiently in the cheerleader routines.

Comedy Duo **Fraser Loring** (Eddie) and **Charlie Kendall** (Malcolm) were excellent as wannabe popular kids and Brett's sidekicks. They worked extremely well together and had excellent comic timing. Fraser had a good singing voice with lovely tone and Charlie sang tunefully and in character. They were joined in Brett's group by **Findlay Pearson** (Richie) and **Melissa Whiting** (Simon). Findlay as Richie was a likeable social guy whilst Melissa as Simon was the quiet unassuming kid that went along with the others. The foursome performed the song "Bad News" brilliantly. It was funny and well sung. I was particularly impressed by Findlay's falsetto!

Creatives

Katie Upton (Director) Katie had ensured that the youngsters had been well prepared and understood their characters which were believable and delivered very well. There was some very good casting and Katie had developed the chemistry between the young actors so that they were very natural together. This was a demanding musical, but it had enormous heart and was full of pace, energy and great teamwork. Overall, this was a great show with a talented cast.

Although not mentioned in the programme Katie had also, I presume, designed the set which was constructed with different levels for the cast to work on. The steps and high level were used very effectively in the second act but could have been used to good effect also in the first act. The 9 small two-sided flats were very effective and painted to represent the New York skyline, Appleton Indiana, the lockers and the girls' toilets. These were moved by the cast and worked well.

Vicki Widdis (Producer, Costume and Props) Vicki as always was very busy producing the show and supporting Katie in the production of the show. The costumes which were a mixture of the youngsters' own and from the Starmaker wardrobe really contributed to the feel of the production. The cheerleader and jocks outfits were very effective and the contrast between the cool kids and the geeks also worked very well. Props were appropriate for their usage.

Amy Bingham and Hannah King (Co-Musical Directors) The musical directors had worked with the cast to produce strong vocals and all the cast sang with confidence. On occasions, some of the vocals

were a little forced, but in the most part, their performances were very good. I was pleased to see that the cast was supported by a live band led by Amy. The band produced a great sound and did not overpower the singers. The band was positioned up on the balcony making it very difficult for the MD to conduct the singers, but they had clearly trained the youngsters to listen to the music so that they all came in bang on time.

Elsie Wood-Blagrove (Choreographer) The excellent and energetic choreography created the mood of the story straight from the first number. The routines were engaging and made good use of repeated patterns which were extremely effective. The cast had been well trained, and their movements were slick and precise and synchronised.

David Parsonson (Stage Manager and voice of the Rabbi) David kept the backstage area clear for the very many entrances and exits ensuring that the cast were safe at all times. Having such an experienced stage manager to run backstage certainly means that everything runs smoothly. David also gave a good voice over for the Rabbi with a perfect accent and excellent rich singing of a Jewish hymn.

Sue Costello (Matron) and **Friends of Starmaker** (Chaperones) With children in the cast and different entrance points under Sue's supervision, the chaperones ensured that they were supervised and safe at all times.

Friends of Starmaker (Hair and Makeup) Lots of ponytails for cheerleaders gave a good effect when they were dancing and doing gymnastics, but toning down some of the girls' makeup would have looked more natural under the lights.

David Riley and Eventu (Lighting Design) with **David Burman and Tom Widdis** (Sound Operation) The stage was well lit for the majority of the time, but there were a couple of occasions when some of the more peripheral areas of the stage were in shadow.

Tom Horrax (Sound Operation) Tom ran the sound well ensuring that the mics were all on at the right time and the sound effects were well cued and appropriate.

Unfortunately, the sound quality from the mics and/or the way the speakers were set up resulted in the vocals sounding muffled at times, which meant that from the audience's point of view, we lost some of the clarity of the performers' diction.

Congratulations to everyone involved with this enjoyable and dynamic production, which we and the audience enjoyed immensely. We look forward to joining you again in the autumn.

Cate

NODA London District 13 Representative

A message from our NODA Youth Co-ordinator

Firstly thank you, as always, for the warm welcome when we arrived to see 13 THE MUSICAL.

From the very first second, this performance burst onto the stage with a huge amount of energy which was maintained throughout by the cast. There were some really super performances - I particularly enjoyed Evan - great confidence and charisma, Archie - wonderful characterization, well maintained throughout and Patrice - what a super singing voice that young lady has! The whole show came across as well rehearsed with everyone relaxed and enjoying being on stage. Some good choreography and well executed dancing - well done everyone!

I did feel that the band was too loud at times and lacked empathy with the soloists which resulted in some songs being shouted and words hard to hear.

Congratulations and good luck with future shows, I hope to see you all soon.

Annie Hertler-Smith
Youth Coordinator
NODA London