



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Reading Operatic Society
Production : Hairspray
Date : Friday 25th September
Venue : Hexagon - Reading
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

I was delighted to be invited to review Hairspray. It is the first time I have seen a stage production of this piece and have to say it is a show that; had it been around 40 plus years ago when I was a young performer, I would've given anything to be involved in.

It had been extremely well cast with some great all round performances from principals and chorus alike. It was dynamic, entertaining and terrific fun, I had; simply the best time. However it was marred on occasion by some poor diction in both dialogue and song, which I think was due to accent and pitch of voice. Remember not everyone knows all the lyrics and we do need to know what is being spoken and sung about; however this did not stop me enjoying all the musical numbers and each and every moment of the show.

Emily Smith – (Tracy Turnblad) – What a stunning opening number! It certainly set high standards for the rest of the show. This was a confident capable performance with good accent, projection and dynamics. She sparkled all the way through and there was excellent depth of character; creating natural relationships with her fellow actors. Her movement was fluid and proficient though not completely instinctive. This was a performance of which she should be immensely proud.

Oliver Kyte – (Corny Collins) – Having seen this talented young man as the band leader in Best Little Whorehouse, I was expecting an exciting performance. I was not disappointed. He has an easy manner which transmits well to the audience; his singing was a pleasure to listen to with some excellent diction. He is visually animated and this complemented his character to the full.

Holly Snowden – (Penny Pingleton) – This was a standout performance! Her visual animation was perfection (just be aware there are times when this needs to be subdued so you do not upstage the main dialogue) as was her movement, and she never lost sight of her aptly over the top character from start to finish. Dialogue was great with good accent and projection; singing was powerfully energetic and tuneful, though the words were not always clear; possibly due to the guttural tone used to belt out the number. However I particularly enjoyed her scene in the bedroom and the ensuing Without Love. This is a young lady I look forward to seeing more of; she has an engaging stage presence and a wealth of talent.

Sarah Abbott – (Prudy Pingleton) - I really enjoyed this dominant characterisation. She had a recherché bearing which was perfect for her character and her dialogue (though not always clear) was well projected with a well maintained accent. She sang her part in Mama I'm a Big Girl Now with zeal and energy blending with the others on stage expertly. Her movement was crisp clean and angular which also befitted the character.

Paul Sheppard – (Edna Turnblad) – Ooo how much fun was this individual? Character, diction, projection, movement and singing were all absolutely first rate. . His partnership with Wilbur was a delight and their duet; You're Timeless to Me a show stopper. When an iconic role such as this is portrayed in amateur theatre; it is easy to replicate one performed by the professional. However he put his own unique stamp on this outstanding characterisation, giving an all-round entertaining flawless performance

Samantha Hopkins – (Amber Von Tussle) – This young lady created an exceptionally delicious; bratty selfish spoilt princess of a character. She certainly looked the part and her deportment was perfect for the role. Her dialogue had all the right inflection with good diction and projection. With facial expressions that were animated and varied she made Amber her own; shallow yet completely three dimensional. Her movement was fluid and natural and singing captivating with excellent diction.

Matt Collins – (Brad)

Chani Neate – (Tammy)

Andrew Johnson – (Fender)

Sophie Elliott – (Brenda)

Olivia Stansbury – (Sketch)

Nicky Jaggar – (Shelley)

Samuel Tait – (IQ)

Charlotte Tait – (Lou Ann) – These eight youngsters supported the main cast with skilful expertise, making them stars in their own right. Their singing and dancing was exemplary; it was lively energetic and uniform. There was one shaky moment during the pas de deux' when they were not all in sync but this was a minor moment easily forgiven. They smiled throughout and it was clear they were savouring every moment. Well done all of you

Henry Bearman – (Link Larkin) – As the young heart throb he had all the necessary qualities to make this a genuine boy next door character. He was thoroughly natural and believable creating a super rapport with Tracy. His dialogue was clear and expressive and his singing mellow with plenty of light and shade. His dance moves were effortless and free and this carried through to his movement round the acting area. This was an impressive all round performance with a winning smile to match.

Nicola Morrin – (Velma Con Tussle) – The villainess of the piece she was deliciously conniving and scheming. I so enjoyed her animated dialogue which was punctuated with great facial expressions. Her flamboyant moves complimented the character perfectly and I loved the way she flounced around the stage with an exaggerated snobbish air. Diction was impeccable in both dialogue and song and her Velma's Revenge had a real Cruella De Vil feel about it proving to be an outright winner.

Craig Duffield – (Harriman F Spritzer) – Although this was a minor character he made the most of it eking every ounce of comedy from the script. His stilted dialogue and movement captured the essence of the role splendidly and he worked the stage with a competent adroitness.

James Gwynne – (Wilbur Turnblad/Gym Teacher) – What a contrast in characters! I have to be totally honest and say that until I read the programme I had been unaware this was the same person. He is a truly versatile character actor capable of drawing the audience in to his world. As Wilbur he was a laid back mild mannered all-encompassing family man. His dialogue movement and singing were superlative, giving just the right amount of gawkiness to a well-developed character. His rapport with Edna was innate with no inhibitions and they even managed a kiss without showing any signs of embarrassment. As stated previously You're Timeless To Me was indeed a show stopper.

Tamla Birch – (Little Inez) – This was a charmingly understated performance. Her dialogue was clean and crisp; though I would've liked a little more projection on occasion; no matter this was a stylised and accomplished portrayal. Her movement was lithe and effortless and her singing true and clear.

Jerome Ifill – (Seaweed Stubbs) – What a great little mover this young man is! Spirited, lively and dynamic do not do justice to the breath-taking routine performed in Run and Tell. He created a fun loving character ready sing and dance at the drop of a hat; it was easy to see why Penny fell for him so readily. Although I did not always understand what he was saying and singing about. I genuinely enjoyed his honest interpretation and execution of this role.

George Apap – (Mr Pinky) – This is a small character role but none the less an important part of the plot. He was ever so slightly camp which I liked as it was not completely over the top. His stance helped to create the ingratiatingly colourful character.

Natasha Mulvey – (Motormouth Maybelle) – I was totally enamoured with this luscious actress. Her characterisation was larger than life as was her personality. Her laughter was contagious and she had a mischievously wicked twinkle in her eye. Her dialogue was well delivered and her movement imposing. However the absolute highlight of the evening was her soulful passionate and stirring rendition of I Know Where I've Been, which was awesome.

Cherie Emmitt

Ellie Ulrich

Charley Woodward – (The Dynamites) – Wow girls you were amazing! Their voices blended immaculately and the harmonies were sensational. They moved well and were the ultimate backing group. Welcome to The 60's was pure magic.

Elaine Lisborg – (Patterson Park High School Principal)

Charley Woodward – (Matron)

Claire Johnson – (Hooker)

Jolene Walsh – (Beatnick Chick)

Samantha Prior – (Guard) – These minor characters played a major part in ensuring this production was a tour de force. They supported the principals through their individual scenes with proficient

Ensemble – Each and every member of the ensemble acquitted themselves admirably. It was clear to see they were enjoying themselves immensely. Their singing and dancing was enterprising with boundless energy and enthusiasm

Alexander McWilliam – (Director) – This is a young man that certainly knows his craft. He has the ability to elicit the most from his actors and ensures they have an in depth understanding of the character they are portraying. His attention to detail is inimitable as is his overall vision. In this piece: which was slick and pacey with good blocking and great staging; he captured all the fun and frivolity whilst bringing out the underlying race issues. Although I felt the first act ran more smoothly than the second; this was none the less, a sui generis and he should feel extremely proud of the overwhelming resounding success achieved.

Anton Gwilt – (Musical Director) – It was more than obvious the hard work he had put in to both principal and ensemble music. He had gathered together a noteworthy group of musicians which he controlled with precision; whilst playing keyboard, ensuring the balance between pit and stage was perfect.

Emma-Jane Taylor – (Choreographer) – All moves created were totally in keeping with the era, offbeat, fanciful and imaginative. She had drilled the cast fastidiously testing their abilities and coming up trumps. I congratulate her on getting everyone on stage dancing; not just moving to music, but actually dancing! You Can't Stop the Beat was an outright triumph with cast and audience.

Stacey Stockwell – (Signing for the Deaf) – The last time I saw this young lady signing, my eye was constantly drawn to her. However on this occasion the action on stage was so good that I forgot she was there. Sorry!

David Parsonson - (Production Manager) – Such a thankless task working so hard in the background with little recognition. However it was obvious that he achieved everything he set out to do; whilst supporting the director and cast, as the show ran smoothly from start to finish.

Carol Hodgkinson – **Chris Dinsey/James Cook** (Stage Manager/ASM's & Crew) – She controlled the stage with expertise ensuring it was well-run. The crew had so much to do yet achieve it they did quickly quietly and inconspicuously. This was a major contributing factor to the seamless smooth running of the show.

Kim Hollamby – (Lighting Design) – This was an excellent plot with good use of spot lights expertly operated by **Louis Martin and Joe Wilson**. The stage was brightly lit when required and atmospheric at others particularly in the cell during Without Love. I am not a fan of the all red stage lighting which a lot of designers use these days, however it really worked!

Ashley Hillier – (Sound No2) – I was impressed with the sound; which sometimes at the Hexagon can be overpowering, it was well balanced and easy on the ear. The on stage mics were effective so we were able to hear the ensemble pieces as clearly as the principals.

Scenic Projects – (Scenery/Properties) – The set was simple fresh and worked well on the Hexagon stage. The props that came with the set worked effectively especially the Har-De-Har hut.

Yvonne Maynard – (Wardrobe Mistress) – With vivid vibrant costumes; which were quintessentially 60's, from **Costume Workshop** she had co-ordinated everything perfectly. I was pleased to see that shoes and accessories had not been overlooked and these complemented the costumes favourably.

Dyland Dambella – (Make-up) – This had been applied with the decade in mind. It was bold radiant and intense.

Hayley Williams – (Hairdresser) – She had ensured that both male and female hairstyles were of the period, which enhanced the costumes and the characters.

RB Wigs – There were several cast members to benefit from the use of a wig; Edna and Tracy included. These were perfect for the period and show and were the icing on the cake, dressing the characters to the maximum.

Programme – The design by **Yvonne Maynard/Andrew Higgs** was vivid showy and fun- the content collated and input was informative and well laid out, whilst **Brian Burden's** photos were clear and attractive.

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13