



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Reading Operatic Society
Production : My Fair Lady
Date : Friday 13th April
Venue : The Hexagon Theatre - Reading
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

I was thrilled to be asked to review Reading's "My Fair Lady" it is one of my all-time favourites with a witty script divine musical numbers and great characters.

I am all for directors taking the initiative and putting a new spin on a classic script; however on this occasion to my mind it didn't work. The relationship between Higgins and Eliza was never one of lovers; so for me this spoiled the whole show. That said there were some fine performances and good characterisations.

Emily Slatter – (Eliza Doolittle) – This young lady looked super and visually she was animatedly vivacious. Her dialogue was well delivered with pace energy and good inflection; however her accents for me never quite made the grade. I would have liked her cockney accent to have had harsher vowel sounds with more ahis and oaws as in the "rhine in Sphine" and "buy a floower of a poor girl". Her stilted posh accent at the races was spot on however this accent continued through the rest of the show and I would have liked it to have become more naturally refined. She created some believable relationships with Pickering and Higgins and I really enjoyed her treatment of Freddy. The rendition of all her musical numbers was good and she put them over expressively in character. I very much enjoyed "I Could Have Danced all Night" and "Without You"

Ben Hudell – (Freddie Eynsford-Hill) – I was so impressed with this young man. He has come such a long way in such a short time. His character was not overly silly but created the impression that he was simple and ineffectual with one desire to woo Eliza. His dialogue was excellent with super diction and a truly believable upper class accent. He moved well around the stage with a lithe fluidity. I liked the rapport he forged with her and the way he looked at her with puppy dog eyes. "On the Street Where You Live" was absolutely superb but I so wanted him to sing to the audience and definitely not the children.

Christopher Bowring – (Colonel Pickering) – This was a natural relaxed characterisation which complemented Higgins' impatient inconsiderate one totally. His dialogue was placid and calm with good projection. I would have liked a more upright bearing as befits a military man; however this did not hinder his overall performance. He sang his part well in "You Did It" and it was great fun.

Steve Hall – (Professor Henry Higgins) – In the opening scene I was uncertain as to whether I was going to enjoy this young mans' performance; however he really grew on me. He is a fine actor and his character developed to capture the very essence of Higgins; being unorthodox eccentric and idiosyncratic yet charismatic and engaging. Dialogue was vital energetic and dynamic. His rapport with Eliza was fabulous (even if I did not agree with the

relationship) and his interaction with everyone else typical of his character. He has a super singing voice and it was refreshing to hear Higgins' numbers actually sung rather than spoken. All his numbers were put over in character but the highlight was "I've grown accustomed to her Face"

Julian Hirst – (Alfred P Doolittle) – This actor had a good cockney accent that was well maintained and his dialogue lively and dynamic. Although he is not a natural mover he managed to characterise his movement to fit his persona. Both his numbers were performed with gusto and enthusiasm.

Anna McCormack – (Mrs Pearce) – I so enjoyed this actress's performance; for me it was one of the best characterisations of the evening. The variation in her dialogue was super from flustered rantings to warm caring words of encouragement but always well enunciated with great inflection. She interacted well with Higgins Pickering and Eliza bringing life to the action. Her animated facial expressions were excellent and really helped to bring out the fun in her scenes.

Margery Jackson – (Mrs Higgins) – This actress was dignified and elegant. Her dialogue was well delivered with good light and shade; though I would have liked the accent to be a little more refined. The contrast between her and Higgins ensured their scenes were subtly amusing.

David Rhodes – (Zolton Karpathy) – This was a well delineated character with a good well maintained accent that was perfect for the role. He was visually animated and this carried through into his dialogue. I particularly liked his flamboyant hand gestures and lively movement

Christian Reddington – (Jamie)

Matthew Jacobs – (Bill)

Nigel Willets – (Harry) – This trio supported Doolittle with great aplomb. They had good dialogue singing and movement and they used this to great effect in their numbers which were performed with energy and bravado.

Julia Sadler – (Mrs Eynsford-Hill)

Nicola Jaggard – (Mrs Hopkins)

Mick Craig – (George/Lord Boxington)

Ellen Darke – (Lady Boxington)

Gloria Griffiths – (Queen of Transylvania)

Natasha Maxworthy – (Mrs Higgins Maid) - These minor characters portrayed their relevant characters with accents and movement that befitted their roles perfectly. They added greatly to the overall performance by supporting the principals with enthusiasm and panache.

George Apap – (Sid)

Ellen Darke – (Flo)

Delun Jones – (May)

Sallyanne Streatham – (Purity)

Rhys Bailey – (Archie) – This group of cockneys was top notch; they had first rate characterisations which they carried through every scene they were involved in. I must give a special mention to Archie who absolutely shone! He beamed his way through the musical numbers had spectacular dance moves and sang brilliantly! I am sure he is destined to go far.

Jennie Dick

Angie Garland

Matthew Jacobs

Delun Jones

Katie Smith

Nigel Willets – (Servants) – This sextet was delightful; they worked as a team using their acting skills to maintain their characters throughout. Their voices blended superbly and the harmonies were excellent. “I Could Have Danced all Night” was superlative and “Poor Professor Higgins” was tight uniform and controlled

Ensemble – This group worked hard producing some varied characterisations and giving enthusiastic support to the principals. I would have liked to have seen more animation in their faces; however they sang and danced with great aplomb even if on the evening of my visit some of the routines were a little ragged. Please note when you are working on a set that consists of nothing but curtains it is so important that you do not touch them when making entrances and exits as this moves them and exposes the masking.

Nicola Allpress – (Director) – This young lady certainly had a vision and she went all out to create on stage what she could see in her mind’s eye. Although there were things that I did not agree with I cannot take away her passion and enterprise. She had created some great characters with good relationships therein. For such a large stage and a relatively small ensemble staging at times appeared crowded and congested meaning that principals had difficulty in manoeuvring their way around; this was particularly noticeable in the opening scene. With the cast using the front of stage for entrances and exits why then did they not use the actual front of the stage; it was as if there were an imaginary line that no one was allowed to cross other than Freddy. For me the Ascot scene lacked that “Wow Factor” and because of the “black box” Eliza’s entrance prior to the ball had no impact. However I liked the staging of the more intimate scenes between Eliza and Higgins and Eliza and Mrs Higgins. She brought out the humour of the piece and gave the action good pace and energy.

Thomas Joy – (Musical Director) – This young man really is a master of his craft. He had worked hard with principals and chorus alike to ensure they were note perfect with some super harmonies, excellent timing and confident entries. He also stressed the importance of diction; when using an accent this is imperative and he succeeded brilliantly. He had expert control over the orchestra who accompanied the singers sympathetically creating a good balance between stage and pit

Auriole Wells – (Choreographer) – The cockney routines had been well devised with some stereotypical movement. Although on the evening of my visit some of the routines were a little ragged they were nonetheless lively and energetic. I found the Ascot scene a little lack lustre but here the movement was tight and uniform. The dance at the ball; was for me, more than a little frantic. Overall the movement was suited to the action as intended.

David Parsonson – (Production Manager) – Once again David did a good job in bringing all aspects of a show together. He must work tirelessly from the first meeting through the build up to the final performance; which culminates in the smooth running of a successful production.

Carol Hodgkinson – (Stage Manager) – **James Cook/Terry Hodgkinson** – (ASMs) and **Crew** -This was a busy stage that was extremely well-run. The SM kept a tight rein on proceedings and assisted by her team ensured all scene changes were carried out quickly and efficiently so the action kept moving and there was no dip in the pace

Kim Hollamby – (Lighting Design) – The necessity for a good lighting plot was paramount to this production as the whole was played in a black box. Thank goodness for spot lights I say! The whole stage was dimly lit throughout almost the whole performance and although it was to a certain extent atmospheric (especially Higgins study) I would like to have been able to see people's faces. Wimpole Street on the other hand was brightly lit and we were able to see Freddy without struggling.

Adrian Croton – (Lighting Programmer) – and assistants **Mark Brome/Louis Martin** these technicians worked expertly ensuring all cues happened seamlessly.

John Ollerenshaw – (Sound Design/Operation) – On the whole sound was good. There were times when I felt the personal mics were too loud but they were cued perfectly so we never missed any dialogue. The stage mics were superb and really enhanced the chorus singing.

Rhi O'Keefe – (Sound 2) – This technician did a fantastic job in cuing the effects; they needed to be exact and they certainly were.

Theatresmith Productions – (Scenery) – I really liked this minimalistic set and it worked really well on this stage. It looked fresh and off set excellently against the black curtains.

Jessica Costello/Emily Gale/Emily Hawkes/Jo Junt – (Properties) – What a busy team this was! All props were authentic and suitable for their purpose; Higgins' desk was suitably cluttered and everything on it just right. I was particularly taken with the phonogram which looked fabulous. I was disappointed with the "flame" I couldn't really make out what it was supposed to be. I'm sure with the proper risk assessment a candle could have been used. The two flower barrows were absolutely super even if they did take up half the stage; and the baskets looked lovely.

Dylan Dambella – (Make-up) – This had been well applied giving the cockneys an outdoor weathered look and the aristocrats looked natural with well-defined features.

Pam Dennis – (Hair Stylist) – This artist had gone to a lot of trouble to ensure hairstyles were of the era and suited the characters perfectly. I really like Eliza's styles which were varied to suit her character in her scenes.

Rosemary Matthews – (Costumes Co-ordinator) – The programme does not mention where the costumes came from; however they were all of period and suited the characters perfectly. I thought Eliza's costumes extremely clever and made her changes easy and manageable.

The cockney outfits were super and Mrs Higgins' and Mrs Eynsford - Hill's frocks suitably elegant. I felt cheated that the Ascot dresses were not black and white however they were of the right era and gave an overall impression of grandeur. I was disappointed with the ball gowns; which were inconsistent in style and length. For future reference please be aware that shoes are of great importance in giving the finish touch to any costume. There was a pair of white boots that really weren't in keeping and it would have been nice if Eliza could have a nice pair of shoes for the ball scene. I'm not sure what footwear Doolittle was wearing but they didn't really complement the costume. Why didn't he have a pair of boots like his cockney mates?

Kate Cook – (Hats) – The Ascot scene is one of the most iconic of any musical and of course the hats are so important to the look. Kate had gone all out to ensure they were big bold and eye catching. On the whole these worked exceptionally well although one or two; to my mind were a little too large. However they certainly made a statement and set off the costumes perfectly.

Programme – designed by **Ryan Stevens/Nicola Allpress** this was a fine looking programme and I really liked the black and white cover. In keeping with the black and white theme **Brian Burden's** cast photos were crisp and clear. The only downfall was the number of errors. Did anyone proof read?

Thank you
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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13