

NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION LONDON REGION

Society ; Reading Operatic Society
Production ; "ALL SHOOK UP"
Date ; Saturday 24th September 2011
Venue ; Hexagon Theatre, Reading
Report by ; Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - Area 13

On Saturday 24th September 2011, I attended The Hexagon theatre to review Reading Operatic Society's latest presentation "All Shook Up". Can I say from the outset how much I admire this society for taking on this challenge, being a show that has not been presented in this area before, particularly in view of the current economic climate. It makes such a change to review a new show instead of the so-called tried and trusted musicals that a lot of society's persist in presenting. I had never seen this show before and I looked forward to it with anticipation. I was not disappointed. The music made famous by the late Elvis Presley came up fresh and new, particularly with the new orchestrations and harmonies for the performers, all of whom excelled in this production with energetic and precise dance routines, good movement and superb singing from all principals and chorus, unfortunately this was not helped by the atrocious sound control which is mentioned later in this report.

Christen Gaskin - (NATALIE HALLER) - In the leading female role, Christen was excellent, her portrayal of a 'Tom Boy' type mechanic was well presented. This was a demanding role requiring an excellent actress, which we had, together with the ability to present the right singing voice both in solo's and concerted numbers, of which there were some twelve. Her movements and diction could not be faulted, a great performance - Well done.

Damian Sollesse - (CHAD) - Damian is a superb actor who manages to immerse himself into whatever part he is playing. The part of 'Chad' is a demanding role, being on stage virtually the whole time, which apart from the acting side of the character, is required to sing some sixteen numbers, both solo and concerted. Damian certainly portrayed the right characterisation which combined with his athletic movement, and good diction, resulted in a fine performance - Congratulations.

Stuart Neal - (JIM HALLER) - As 'Natalie's' father, Stuart achieved just the right balance for the character, entering fully into the spirit of the production showing his longing for his late wife and at the same time having feelings for his daughter. His diction was good and vocally he came across very well in his numbers blending well with 'Chad' and 'Sylvia' - Well done.

Anna Jennings - (SYLVIA) - Here was another great performance by Anna as the owner of Sylvia's Honky-Tonk. Her characterisation of the no-nonsense owner was spot-on. Again here we had good diction and projection and her movement about the stage area was confident and controlled. Vocally Anna lent her excellent singing voice to some six numbers and her duet with 'Jim' was a 'show-stopper' - A great performance.

Louise Woods - (LORRAINE) - The description in the programme of 'Lorraine' being pretty, smart and a total romantic was totally correct as displayed by Louise on stage, her characterisation could not be faulted, all combined with a good singing voice which not only blended well with the others but came to the fore in the duet with 'Dean' in 'It's Now Or Never' which was well sung.

Richard Bott - (DENNIS) - I have, over the years, watched Richard develop into the fine character actor he is now. His portrayal of 'Dennis' could not be faulted. His awkwardness bordering on 'nerdish' could not have been bettered and the way he moved about the stage was brilliant. Diction and facial expressions were great and his singing voice blended well and came to the fore in his solo 'It Hurts Me' - Well done.

Jennie Gumbrell - (SANDRA) - What a revelation!!!! I have only seen Jennie performing in operetta to which she lends her superb singing voice together with her ability to portray characters correctly, so to see her step outside this genre and portray the beautiful, intellectual caretaker of the town's museum with sexual overtones was an eye-opener. What a great performance with superb acting and singing - Congratulations.

Sam Rogers - (MAYOR MATILDA HYDE) - Sam gave a good interpretation of this role, her posture, facial expressions and diction ensured that you were left in no doubt that she was the Mayor. Her interaction with her son 'Dean' was good and we were presented with a well sung 'Devil in Disguise'.

Shaun Blake - (DEAN HYDE) - As the young lad who was under his mother's wing and who eventually rebels and stands up for himself after finding 'girls'. Shaun ensured that we were aware of his character which he portrayed very well - A good portrayal.

Philip Elliott - (SHERIFF EARL) - This minor role was well played by Phil. He is normally seen either in the chorus or in a minor non-speaking role so it was good to see him play the role of the Sheriff who endeavours to get a word in with the Mayor and who is eventually successful at the end. His characterisation was good together with excellent timing.

Chorus of Townspeople Etc; - This chorus was top-notch entering into the spirit of the production. Here we had singing of a high order with good entries and well balanced voices. Movement and characterisation could not be faulted and you looked as if you were thoroughly enjoying yourselves.

Dancers - Georgia Dunne, Charlotte Gravestock, Fiona Latham, Becky Lewendon, Shanie Lynch - These five young ladies brought their choreographic expertise to the various routines which was danced with elan and precision and looking stunning in their costumes - Well done.

Booth Singers - Ray Fullbrook, Geoff Littler, Gordon Stoker Stewart, Barrie Theobald, Anthony Witt - This group who spent the performance in the orchestra pit, provided an ensemble group of mature voices which blended well with the performers on stage giving a greater depth to the singing.

Scott Jenkins - (DIRECTOR & CHOREOGRAPHER) - Scott is to be praised for his presentation of this show. It had been well staged and the principals had been well cast bringing out some excellent characterisations. His choreography had been well thought out with the various routines fitting the action of the musical, it had been well rehearsed ensuring precise and energetic routines. The whole show had tremendous pace with well picked up cues. Although the story line was weak, he had obviously instilled in the cast the joy of performing which certainly came across to the audience.

Andy Milburn - (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) - I understand that Andy was responsible for setting most of the music, before leaving due to other commitments?

Marc Pizer - (CONDUCTOR) - My congratulations to Mark who I understand came in at the last minute and ensured that the cast not only new their music, but sang the various numbers correctly resulting in an excellent sound from both chorus and principals. Mark also displayed excellent control of his small orchestra, on the night of my visit, it had a good balance throughout.

David Parsonson - (PRODUCTION MANAGER)

Carol Hodgkinson - (STAGE MANAGER)

Chris Dinsey - (ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER)

Stage Crew - This group obviously work well together as this was a well managed stage throughout - Very slick.

Lighting Design & Crew - An Impressive lighting design by **Kim Hollamby** and his crew of **Rebecca Wyard** who ensured the right atmosphere was generated on stage. I particularly liked the lamps positioned stage left and right on the upright section of the Pros' arch which gave an added dimension to the lighting plot. The overhead spots worked well with the principals standing in the centre of each one - That must be a first - Congratulations.

Lighting and Sound - The Hexagon - Overall the lighting appeared well controlled by the Hexagon staff, but the same cannot be said of the sound which was appalling. For me it ruined what was a superb production, being so loud that it was painful to the eardrums, but the worst part was it completely distorted the singing voices of the members of the cast who were mike'd, which was a shame because there were some excellent voices displayed. For some time I have criticised this aspect of the Hexagon, even to the extent of having meetings with the management, all to no avail as they state they are 'professionals' !! I have now taken the liberty of writing to the Councillor for Leisure and Sport of the Reading Borough Council in my capacity as the NODA Representative and I await the result, but I am not holding my breath.

Costumes - I could not fault the costumes, they fitted the cast members well and ensured the right period was denoted. The dancers costumes looked most effective from the front and congratulations to the Wardrobe Department for ensuring the cast looked good on stage

Scenery - This was a good multi-purpose set which enhanced the performance by allowing two levels on stage by the use of a bridge. This allowed the Director to improve the positioning on stage by both principals and chorus - Very effective.

Props - A good selection of props which had been well researched and fitted the action of the show, most impressive was the appearance of the motor cycle.

Make-up - This aspect looked good under the stage lights, it had been well applied and characterised.

Programme - A good programme which contained all the necessary information with interesting cast biographies and clear photographs, all contained in a bright, eye-catching cover.

Front of House - Reading always manage to mount good Front of House staff who are smart, easily identifiable, friendly and helpful to their audience.

Thank you for inviting me to review your latest production and your excellent hospitality. I found it to be a most enjoyable show apart from the sound!! Good luck with your next production and a larger audience.

Henry

NODA Regional Representative - London Region - Area 13