



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Younger Generation
Production : Musicality
Date : 12th August
Venue : Harlequin Theatre
Report by : Phil Wilcox

Show Report

General

This was my first encounter with this talented company who on this showing more than lived up to their continuing philosophy of giving young people between the ages of 9 and 18 the opportunity to appear on stage in a professional environment. As with all their shows, the latest production was tailored to the cast's ability and range, and the enthusiasm of the roughly 40-strong ensemble came across perfectly from beginning to end.

A really enjoyable evening which had the audience clapping along. Following the Younger Generation (YG) tradition, the (almost) final song was *Thank You Very Much* from *Scrooge*, which I am informed is the company's way of acknowledging the audience and everyone concerned with putting on the show. This no doubt includes Stage Director Keith Barrett, who I note returns from the Isle of Wight for a week each time to oversee the productions.

I can only echo those sentiments by saying thank you very much indeed to all concerned for making my wife and I feel so very welcome. YG's much-missed former member, Evelyn Lillico, to whom the show was dedicated, would be proud. I came out of the theatre with a warm glow, singing the finale number, *We'll Always Be Together*, to myself. The show should have been re-titled *Musi-quality!*

Direction

Main director Trudy Paine, now in her 29th year with YG, together with Senior Assistant Director Emma Crozier and their seven assistant directors (all of whom I believe have come up through the ranks) deserve a collective accolade. They drew out the best in their cast with excellent, sometimes challenging and offbeat, choices of material, with imaginative staging and relatively uncomplicated dance moves.

The Music

There was an embarrassment of material to choose from. I had thought I knew virtually every west end show and songs, but there were some revelations to me, each well selected. The four-piece band, under the capable baton of Neil Shrimpton, produced some first class accompaniment. My only criticism is that perhaps the over-enthusiastic drummer might perhaps have been reined in a little during the more upbeat numbers. The soloists, despite having mics, were sometimes drowned out from four rows back.

Choreography

Simplicity of movement proved very effective for such a large ensemble consisting of varying levels of experience. The ballet routines complementing some of the solo singers' routines were perfectly drilled and enjoyable to watch, and I particularly liked the tap routine.

Costumes

These were faultless. What a tremendous job Diane Rextrew and her small team do. They successfully conjured up everything from hula skirts to nuns' habits via gold spangled tops and flared trousers with colourful inserts. Add to this a riot of blue, red, yellow and purple dresses and wigs of all hues and the overall effect was pure magic.

Set

A mixture of hired and self-made, the drops (occasionally seemingly reaching as far as the cyc at the back of the Harlequin's deep stage) illustrated the frequent changes of scene with great success. Use of the gauze and strip curtains pleased the eye.

Props

Ingenuity was the keyword, with cast members at one stage sliding on from either side of the stage on low trolleys. I loved the simply-constructed "car" in the Grease section, but even more so the "Chitty" car later on, which took on a life of its own! The colourful umbrellas in the *Singing In The Rain* routine stood out.

The Production

For the most part it was slick, with seamless segues from show to show and number to number. The enthusiasm and sheer enjoyment of the entire cast came across well and truly, both in their singing and in the exuberant dance routines. Good use was made of rostra when onstage platforms were needed. As is customary with YG, there were deliberately no individual credits shown against the musical numbers in the programme. However, if I may be so bold, apart from the component members of the trio who collectively washed the man out of their hair, and Purley's answer to the Supremes, I would like to single out three of the more experienced members who deserve to go far. Take a bow, the anonymous young lady with the soaring, beautiful voice who, though the number itself is a spoof, did full justice to *The Song That Goes Like This* from Spamalot; the tall guy who sang *The Impossible Dream*; and another talented lass who displayed a maturity beyond her years while putting across a superb version of *Making Whoopee*. You all know who you are!

Lighting

There were some excellent touches. I liked the idea of the illuminated signs being flown in to indicate the various shows as they came up. The flashing, alternate colours on the backdrop worked well, as did the rainbow lighting. However, my personal favourite was the highly effective luminous sequence, where one could suspend belief and watch "Chitty" actually flying. There were occasional glitches, with the stage in darkness while the audience waited (possibly for a mike to be brought on on one occasion), but this did not detract too much.

Sound

Generally well-balanced throughout. The use of pre-recorded music for some of the numbers worked well.

Programme

Well designed, glossy, colourful, with the NODA logo prominently displayed on the cover, I am delighted to say. Full of interesting information about the company, complete with cast photos. I thought the Personal Messages page, where relatives of cast members were able to send good luck wishes, was a nice, novel touch.

Front of House

My wife and I were welcomed by committee member and cast registrar Christine Tarrant, who introduced us to Diane and to John, our attentive chaperone for the evening. A good first impression, which makes us want to return.

Phil Wilcox, Regional Representative London District 5