



Society : The Younger Generation Theatre Group
Production : Brexit Blues
Date : 16th August 2019
Venue : Harlequin Theatre, Redhill
Report by : Phil Wilcox

teur theatre

Show Report

Your topically-titled show proved to be every bit as good as other Younger Generation productions I have seen.

As usual, it was apparent that a great deal of effort had gone into its preparation, from choice of music to striking costumes and sets, and it paid off.

Bouquets all round to prolific executive producer and ace costume supervisor **Diane Rextrew**, with her assistants in that department, **Sheila Dixon** and **Teresa Borg**; top class director **Trudy Paine** and inspiring senior director **Emma Crozier** and assistant directors **Chloe Devine**, **Joanna Flynn**, **Lauren Mills**, **Gemma Skilton**, **Lizzie Penny**, **Vickie Tillman** and **Jade Williams**.

Great sounds from the pit, too, from MD **Neil Shrimpton** on piano and fellow musicians **Simon Connor**, **Dom Palmer** and **Alex Steer**.

The witty theme of Brexit, ranging from country to country during the evening, worked well and was summed up in the show's opening scena, *European Parliament*. Aptly-named songs for both Remainers and die-hard Brexiteers ranged from *I Want To Break Free* to *Don't Leave (Me This Way)* and *The Final Countdown*. All were well-performed and staged, with some imaginative dances and use of hands and arms.

A minor hitch before the beginning of the "Germany" item (*99 Red Balloons*), while reliable (and consistently technically brilliant) lighting designer and operator **Tamykha Patterson** waited to illuminate some tardy performers, was more than compensated for by a simply beautiful solo, sweetly sung with every word clear, accompanied by a well-staged routine performed by a group of dancers, each holding one of the titular balloons. Truly one of my favourite items of the evening.

On to Ireland, represented by three contrasting songs. Two groups on either side of the tuneful soloist in Snow Patrol's wondrous *Chasing Cars* swapped sides effectively during the number, and there was some nice use of props (tankards) as well.

A tremendous dance routine accompanied *Runaway*, with the singer making the most of the stage, and a very confident young man sang a highly entertaining version of *Galway Girl*.

An offbeat, somewhat surreal routine represented the Danish contribution, where rectangular, variously-coloured cards and cardboard picture frames, carried on by a variety of performers wearing high-viz jackets, were used to great effect. At one stage, one participant smoothly switched to become another behind a visible frame.

The *coup de grace* was saved until the end, when all the various objects which had been used to depict items such as a small yacht were revealed from behind a black drape as making up the components of a house shape. Superb!

There was the usual variety of eye-catching costumes to be seen in the next segment (Netherlands), with nine girls in black tops and red shorts in some slick routines dancing to three up-tempo songs from a pair of well-dressed young ladies, with good solos and whose well-practised harmonies blended perfectly.

During one of the solos, a problem with the sound (otherwise smoothly run in the main by **Devon Oakley**) was swiftly dealt with when a hand mic materialised from the wings – handed over, I suspect, by one of the four unobtrusive members of the essential radio mics team, **Joanna Flynn, Lizzie Penny, Gemma Skilton** or **Vickie Tillman**.

The set for the Iceland section was truly stunning: two brightly-coloured market stalls (flowers and fruit), with a well-dressed stage populated by everyone from mechanics and roadsweepers to people reading newspapers, creeping around to Bjork's song *It's Oh So Quiet*. This gave the soloist ample opportunity to display her alternating soft and loud vocals.

Your Eurovision-themed finale to the first half brought back many pleasant memories, with a thoughtfully chosen selection of past UK entries. The customary hanging illuminated sign came into play, as well as the colourful hanging strips and brightly-lit staircase.

Just A Little Bit was well sung – and with a smile! The “*Puppet*” routine was equally effectively vocalised and neatly choreographed. The quartered outfits stood out, as did the 10 performers who sang *Save Your Kisses For Me* in sparkling tops and different-coloured flares.

Attention to sartorial detail was also evident in the next number, which offered us not one, but *eight* mini Cliff Richards – all attired in accurate replicas of his of his *Congratulations* outfit of blue satin suit and lace jabot. It worked!

The soloist in *Love Shine A Light* certainly did the song justice and the number, with the ensemble gathered on the steps using torches to full effect, ended the first half on a high.

Then oh boy! What a unique IDEA someone had had to open Part Two. The set was transformed into a replica of a certain home accessories store of a very similarly-spelt name, complete with

bright shelves and even the odd trolley or two, with appropriately-costumed “staff” mingling with customers in a medley of ABBA songs.

There was well-directed constant movement around the stage – I noted a bit of business with a diminutive kid attempting to reach the top shelf, for example. I can truthfully say I have never seen *I Have A Dream* sung (effectively) using a shopping trolley as a prop before. Nor have I witnessed such a clever use of mobile “check out screens” as in *Take A Chance On Me*.

Equally inventive was the simple notion of two holiday reps (in the Spanish sequence) taking turns to teach a bunch of kids the moves to three catchy novelty dances. The duo were excellent. Very entertaining.

The four consecutive, widely differing dance routines representing Italy were sublime, ranging from a strikingly-dressed number (reminiscent of Kylie’s gold lamé shorts) to a ballet, using different-coloured scarves, accompanied by ethereal music and set against a deep red background,

Figures frozen behind a gauze signalled one of the main contributions to the Russian section – a well-devised extract from *Fiddler On The Roof*, which featured some gifted soloists, a smattering of dialogue and some good ensemble work. Once again, the costumes, especially for the boys, stood out.

The French element (complete with tricolore backing lighting) had a little of everything thrown in, from a stunning ballet routine (danced skilfully and gracefully *en pointe* by five youthful ladies in attractive midnight blue tutus) to a more frenetic dance neatly performed by participants in red tops and white trousers.

And, oh, yes, I thought last year’s tap dancing penguins would take some beating, but you managed to surpass it with a brilliant, somewhat surreal, if not faintly sinister display of perfectly executed tapping by performers wearing white helmets with tinted visors. Unique!

In the sequence of punk/rock/street numbers which followed, the accompanying colours on the backcloth progressed through orange, pale blue and purple as the ensemble showed they had learned the energetic routines well.

Austria, of course, just begged to be represented by something from *The Sound of Music* and I was not disappointed as a talented mixed bag of members sang *So Long, Farewell*. And then it was time for the YG boys and girls to say their own farewell to us.

The well-established *Thank You Very Much* finale song was sandwiched between reminders of the preceding enjoyable couple of hours, namely Abba’s *Thank You For The Music* and Eurovision’s *Making Your Mind Up*, followed by some well thought out curtain calls.

It was a typical “happy clappy” finish and, no matter what happens at the end of October, I for one certainly didn’t end up feeling the Brexit Blues.

Ten out of ten to everyone who contributed to this thoroughly enjoyable show in your various invaluable capacities, including stage director **Keith Barrett**, unflappable assistant stage manager **Gerry Winter** and deputy **Emma Crozier** and their efficient crew, and the scenery making team (**Michael Berry**, **John Blundell** and, wearing yet another hat, Diane Rextrew).

I look forward to seeing your next production – by which time we shall know whether we are in, out or shake it all about.....

Thank you for inviting me.