

Society: WOW Youth Musical Theatre
Venue: Weymouth Pavilion
Production: The 40th Anniversary WOW Show
Director: Martine Burt
Choreographer: Martine Burt
Musical Director: Nikki Budd
Date seen: Thursday 17th November 2022

SHOW REPORT

The standards WOW sets and achieves are astonishing and this 40th Anniversary Show was certainly that. The opening numbers (Fin T, Ben, Chloe, Amelia S, Patrick, Isaac, Reuben and Company) were from *Newsies*, a relatively new musical about the New York newsboys' strike of 1899. This was a superb way to open, starting gently with 'Once and for all' and just five of the newsboys singing on stage initially, before kicking into gear with hordes more 'newsies' pouring onto the stage and filling it in every way with their passionate, punchy singing and dancing. When they sang out with strength the line '10,000 fists in the air', that's what it felt like. This was followed by 'The world will know' and 'Seize the day', with a great duet and trio and stunningly athletic dance moves, including some expert stomping on newspapers, from the company. This opening set the standard for what was to follow – the whole company, and orchestra, working seamlessly as one, weaving together music, song and dance moves; very impressive to be able to achieve this with such a large number of performers on stage at the same time (impressive, too, I imagine, to have managed to organise the rehearsal schedule for so many people).

A change of pace brought 'Memory' from *Cats*, superbly and beautifully sung, with raw emotion, by Corey Farwell, and then several numbers from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, again displaying consummate ability to deliver a vast number of complex moves, all working as one. The harmonies in 'Hushabye Mountain' were delightful.

Three numbers from *Cabaret* followed. Patrick was brilliant in the role of the MC in the opening *Willkommen*: great singing, acting, expression and movement. The liveliness of this song continued in *Money* (Elliot /Amelia S and Company), which included a long line of high-kickers and some other, equally impressive, intricate dance moves. Mersey Moore rounded off the *Cabaret* section with a highly accomplished rendition of *Maybe This Time* that was both strong and sensitive. Staying in the Jazz Age, the action moved to Chicago. Both 'Razzle Dazzle' (Reuben and Company) and 'Both reached for the gun' (Ben, Millie W, Caitlin and Group) zinged and sizzled with energy. The ventriloquist and dummy double act worked really well, and the band, as throughout the show, was superb.

The 1920s theme continued with the first of the Traditional Musicals medley: 'Not for the Life of Me' from *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. This was sung beautifully and with great energy by Chloe, backed up by a great chorus, and as in the Chicago numbers, the American accents were impressively well delivered. It was followed by 'I'm Not at all in Love' (Amelia R with Millie W and Hollie, ensemble: Caitlin, Molly, Amelia S, Evie, Hollie, Mersey, Maria, Amelia, Sophie), all with great voices and there were great interactions between the lead and the others. 'Secret Love' was a superb solo from Caitlin Bennett and the final three numbers included wonderful solo singing, powerful chorus singing, complex, fast-paced dance moves and bags of energy which built and built to close the first half in style: 'Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat' (Fin T with Amelie, Finley and Cabaret/Chicago Group), 'Supercalifragalisticexpialidocious' (Mersey and Cabaret Group) and *42nd Street* (Chloe and full Company). The moving of the chairs in 'Sit Down...' was very effective and the en-masse tap-dancing in *42nd Street* was most impressive.

Act 2 opened with two stirring songs from *Hamilton: An American Musical*: 'Hamilton' (Ben, Mallachy, Fin T, Patrick, Reuben, Isaac, Corey, Molly and Company) which included, in addition to great singing and dancing,

some excellently coordinated finger-snapping; and ‘Yorktown’, a high-octane, big ensemble number. Four very moving songs followed: a powerful performance of Sister Act by Maeli Thomas; a powerful and interesting rendition of ‘Somewhere’ (Caitlin and Company), done as a large cast number with lovely harmonies, striking red and white costumes, and very still, without dance moves, which gave great focus to the excellent singing; and a gentle and moving ‘Beauty and the Beast’ (Mersey, Maelei, Caitlin, Molly, Ava, Indi, Amelie, Lily H, Lacie, Lily S, Dulcie, Isaac, Corey, Patrick, Ollie V, Oliver C, Finley S, Reuben, Elliot, Mallachy).

The following section, Modern Musicals, opened with an absolute delight – the thoroughly enjoyable and brilliantly performed comic number ‘A Musical’ (Fin T and Ben with Dancers: Chloe, Amelia S, Amelia, Millie W, Sophie, Molly, Maria, Evie, Dulcie, Reuben, Isaac). The singing, acting and movement of the two leads was top-notch and the tap-dancing of the dancers was stunning. The quality continued with Mersey Moore singing ‘Someone Like You’ with great feeling, followed by ‘Footloose’ (Patrick, Maelei, Mersey, Caitlin, Millie S, Maria, Evie, Amelia R, Molly and Company) and ‘9 to 5’ (Reuben, Sophie, Chloe, Millie W and Company).

The energy of the show built with these to culminate in the amazing grand finale of songs from We Will Rock You, including ‘Radio Ga Ga’ (Cabaret/Chicago Group), ‘We Will Rock You’ (Ollie V, Patrick and Company) and an ambitious and triumphantly accomplished ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ (Isaac, Maelei and Company). The two lead singers worked really well together as did the Company and, indeed, the costumes. The choreography, with everyone jumping up and down in perfect time, was fabulous, as was the band (with a noteworthy performance of the famous electric guitar solo). Another triumph was ‘Somebody to Love’, starting gently and building to a ‘belter’. This song could have been arranged to have a backing chorus but in a bold and creative move by the director, Corey Farwell delivered it absolutely superbly as a solo – all the more impressive for that fact. I heard several members of the audience near me say out loud at the end of the song what I had been thinking and feeling – ‘wow!’.

The audience had indeed been held enthralled by the whole show. Along with the excellent band, great lighting, stunning costumes, brilliant direction and creative choreography, the immense commitment and dedication of the whole company and crew was clear to see, and the levels of talent and energy were astonishing. Some of the solo singers moved straight on to their solos after having just performed in an ensemble, and to sing a solo without the context and build-up that would have been provided in a full musical, to come to it ‘cold’, as it were, is a big challenge – they all pulled it off brilliantly. Above all the whole company was highly disciplined, demonstrating great teamwork – that vital ingredient which helped give the show its ‘wow’ factor. The audience had loved it the whole way through and the cast and band had thoroughly deserved their rousing encore number ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’.

Martin Stephen

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough PE2 7UH

Tel 01733 374790 **Fax** 01733 237286 **Email** info@noda.org.uk **Web** www.noda.org.uk

Twitter @NODAtweets **Facebook** NationalOperaticDramaticAssociation

Registered CIO charity number 1171216 Registered company number 241572 Registered in England and Wales at the above address.

Patrons: The Lord Lloyd Webber and Connie Fisher