

## **Paul Tarrant District 10**

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### **Bossy - Les Miserables**

Director - Gaynor Wilson  
Musical Director – David Pickthall  
Brentwood Theatre Essex

Every time I go to see a Bossy production I know that Gaynor Wilson as director, will have set the boundaries for the group even high than previously. At present she has a team of young talented performers some of whom are soon to commence acting school and Les Miserables was the perfect vehicle for their final full production. The opening grabbed our attention immediately and hereafter one was totally involved. Singing was strong and confident under the musical direction of David Pickthall and the harmony in such pieces as At the End of the Day and One More Day was superb. James Wilson as Jean Valjean showed both strength and maturity in his portrayal and Reiss Meister as Javert transformed his usual fun demeanour to one of contempt and hate showing the versatility of this young actor. Katie Lawrence played Fantine with sensitivity and control and it was a pleasure to hear her well rounded voice maturing into that of a young mezzo soprano. Well done. Master of the House was exceptionally well delivered and greatly appreciated by the audience. This was a production worthy of praise and I wish them all the very best for the future. Thank you for your hospitality

*Report by Vicki Avery*

### **Leigh Operatic and Dramatic Society - The Likes of Us**

Director: Tessa Davies  
Musical Director: Rachael Plunkett  
Choreographer: David Street  
The Palace Theatre, Westcliff-on-Sea 23rd October 2009

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The first collaboration between Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber seems an attractive choice for societies like LODS, who are always on the look out for something new. The draw of two well-known names and the sympathetic subject of Dr Barnardo ought to promise a certain hit.

The role of Barnardo was taken by first-timer Olly Gourley; still at school, but already in possession of a well-produced, lovely voice, and a good stage presence. His was a most promising performance, and I look forward to seeing much more of him in future productions. The young lovers Jenny and Johnny (Amy Price and James Moore) were equally fresh-faced and sweet voiced, with good energy and commitment; their dance in particular was well executed. I was confused at the programme's description of Rose as a prostitute 'with a heart of gold', as there was no indication of any heart – gold or otherwise – in the lyrics or music written for this rabble-rouser, but Kathy Clarke had the role to a tee, and along with some nice cameos from old hands Peter Brown and Andy Gourley, this was a talented cast.

The chorus work was excellent; good singing, tight choreography, and lots of interaction (in short, all that I've come to expect from LODS), and the band, despite sickness problems, provided good support. The sound balance was the best I've heard at the Palace for an amateur show.

I was disappointed in the costumes, which seemed to be a mix of periods, and the street children were far too clean and neat in their rooftop scene (although they sang beautifully). However, the biggest disappointment was the show itself. The lyrics and music were rarely interesting, there was no tension and little character development or plot. Ostensibly about Barnardo, we came away with little idea of his character, or the social and political upheavals that he caused. This was not the fault of the company, the fact that they, along with Craig Kirby's dry and humorous narration, managed to hold it together at all is testament to their skill, and not Rice/Lloyd Webber's.

There was such a lot of talent on display tonight, it was a shame that the material did not provide the company with much to work with. I look forward to *Anything Goes* in the Spring, which I know will show off LODS to far better advantage.

### **Little Theatre Company - Buddy**

Directors: Ian Gilbert & Stephanie Wilson

Musical Director: Paul Day

Choreographer: Laura Wilson

The Palace Theatre, Westcliff 30th October 2009

We knew it was going to be a fun night at The Palace Theatre when brightly dressed bobby-soxers gave us cardboard 'Buddy Holly' glasses with our programmes, and said 'We want to see you up and dancing at the end!'; their enthusiasm was infectious and there was quite a buzz as we entered the auditorium.

As we've come to expect from LTC, the show did not let us down. Full of colour and energy, everyone on stage gave his or her all and clearly enjoyed every minute. Tim Cater's impersonation of Buddy Holly was superb, capturing the Texan hick accent and rather nerdish demeanour of the singer perfectly. Darren Harper and Jamie Redgate as The Crickets played their parts with their usual excellent eye for comedy, and all the cast worked tightly and convincingly to tell the story of a rather unlikely Rock and Roll star (hard to imagine Simon Cowell letting anyone wear those spectacles in this, more 'packaged pop', age).

Dancing, costumes, lighting were all bright and exuberant, and the two-level set worked well for studio and The Surf Ballroom, and also allowed members of the company to show off their instrumental skills. If I have one minor quibble, it was that some of the dialogue needed to be sharper in the confrontational scenes; but I am nit-picking in what was a very good show.

The only disappointment of the evening was problems with sound. This was not LTC's fault; I understand the theatre's usual sound operator was off that night, so we were unlucky – but it is such a shame for the professionalism and hard work of the amateur societies to be undermined in this way. No matter – by the end we were indeed up and dancing, and left determined to hunt out some Buddy Holly records!

Yet another excellent evening from LTC; congratulations to all involved.

### **Southend Operatic and Dramatic Society - My Fair Lady**

Director: Les Cannon

Musical Director: Andrew Denyer

Choreographer: David Street

The Cliffs Pavilion, Westcliff-on-Sea 6<sup>th</sup> November 2009

This ever popular show with its well known tunes and brilliant dialogue is a sure-fire winner for societies, as indicated by the 13 different productions that I have seen the last 3½ years,

easily the highest number for all other shows seen. It has been rewarding to see in many of these the effort that has been made to explore meanings and emphases in the production and not simply to rely on the film's interpretations.

The SODS production team followed this pattern and veteran SOD (but first time director) Les Cannon, notably gave Higgins an obsessive-compulsive tidiness, abandoned in the final scene when Eliza returns, leading to yet another different and acceptable (but not to Bernard Shaw I suspect) curtain sequence to add to the many variations that I have seen. Andrew Denyer brought out some excellent chorus singing (particularly the difficult servants' music), and his fine orchestra pulled out all the stops. David Street's choreography was good throughout bringing demeanour to the upper crust scenes and a real exuberance to those in Covent Garden, 'Get Me to the Church ....' being a notable highlight.

Laura Hurrell, in her second principal role for the Society, was a beautiful Eliza, and though just a touch constrained in early scenes, blossomed well through the play to a fine conclusion. This was a good role for her and I look forward to seeing her continue to grow as a performer. Roger Davies was a most uptight and pompous Higgins, who finally thawed towards Eliza, but with indications of a few well masked dialogue problems along the way. Dick Davis was a Pickering of politeness itself. Daryl Kane enjoyed himself immensely as the best Doolittle that I have seen for some time, and the scenes with his two sidekicks (Jonathon Buxton and Brian Shaw) were beautifully timed. A successful show is not just about the leads, however, and SODS pulled together an entire company of almost 60 committed and well cast players for this production.

Wardrobe was very good in all the walks of lives portrayed, though Eliza's market clothes really did not justify Higgins' description of them. (True of every production of this show that I have seen!). The ladies' Ascot and Ball costumes deserve a very special mention. How could Eliza fail to act like a lady dressed in such stunning outfits? – and all the female chorus looked thoroughly aristocratic in these scenes. The effect was spoiled a little, however, by the rather large and very obvious head microphones; time for a rethink perhaps, with period costume especially?

An excellent show and many congratulations to all concerned in a production as good as I've seen from the SODS.

### ***Report by John Warburton - Regional Councillor***

#### **Benfleet Operatic Society - Oklahoma!**

Director: Jackie Newman

Musical Director: Rachel Plunkett

The Appleton School, Benfleet 29<sup>th</sup> October 2009

Benfleet Operatic really deserved more than the thirty or so audience on Thursday night. This was a bright, cheery show, and did a lot of dispel the gloom of a late October evening.

The cast included some fine performances, with Rob Turner as Curly, Emma Mitchell as Ado Annie particularly impressing with their acting and good comedic timing. Peter Robinson as Will Parker also stood out, proving that less can be more with his endearingly funny, but understated portrayal of a rather slow-witted cowboy. Anita Gray was a sweetly sung Laurie. Chorus too interacted well and enjoyed their big numbers, supported well by the small but perfectly formed band. Paul Lazell's sets as usual did much to enhance the atmosphere. Some attention could be given in future to the chorus entrance and exits which were slightly clunky – although I appreciate the difficulties on a school stage – but this was a good showcase for BOS's talents, and I look forward to the next production.

#### **Marlborough Dramatic Club, Dead Man's Hand**

Director – Louise O Connor

Performed at The Memorial Hall, Brentwood School, October 23rd 2009.

It's either a treat or a trial to watch a group that is unknown to you perform a play that is unfamiliar in a theatre that you have never visited before. I am pleased to confirm that this evening was a real treat. The Memorial Hall is a barn of a hall for the production of a play and is easily one of the largest venues for a play that I have seen in the area. This does have the disadvantage of reducing the intimacy that is common in smaller venues and makes you very much aware that you are watching something on stage rather than being almost part of the performance. On the other hand the acting basics of projection and enunciation are forced upon the cast if they are to be heard and understood and these skills were generally very much in evidence, whereas lesser actors can get away with weaker basic skills in smaller village halls and studio theatres. There were one or two losses of audibility, particularly from Guy Harding's Brian, especially when he turned away from the audience but these were rare and did not detract from what was a strong performance. In fact the cast was very well balanced with no weaknesses. I was captivated by Lindsey Crutchett's characterization of Jennifer as the confident and liberated housewife who, one felt, would have no problem moving on with her life if her marriage to Brian did indeed fail. Full of energy and nuance Jennifer owned the stage and I found it hard to believe we may not see her again after her murder. Brian was more conservative, controlled and highly credible as the husband indifferent to his wife's needs. Martin Reynolds resisted overplaying the gritty Northerner, Derek, and together with Natalie Sant's Corrie as his wife (verging on brassy but with redeeming features of honesty and judgement) made a highly convincing couple. This could so easily have moved into crass stereotype that director and cast must take credit for holding back here. The one character that stood out as being out of place was Franco, played by Nick Lupton. His every appearance during the opening scene cried foul, not because of his cod Italian accent which was fine but because of his moustache. I suppose that this was a director's and perhaps author's hint to the audience that this scene was not what it seemed and was deliberately meant to throw audience suspicion on Franco throughout the subsequent scenes.

When the play within a play format was revealed the plot started to twist and turn in so skilful a manner that there were no obvious clues for the audience to follow. Pamela, played by Lesley Curtis, was cleverly added to the plot as the stage manager and threw us into more confusion as the first proper murder was revealed. Pamela's anguish and shock during this scene was palpable and gave me my first frisson of excitement. The shifting of suspicion from player to player was extremely fluent and the revelation of Franco's death by Brian/Martin left the entire audience in a quandary. Although the eventual solution and the motivation for it was deliberately contrived it was clear that this was a very clever and well written play, extremely well cast and intelligently directed. Character assessments made in earlier scenes and even my own critical thinking about the set quality was put into context and explained by subsequent events. Lighting, especially the dedicated stage lamps, worked well and the music between scenes was well chosen and highly appropriate for the mood. I very much enjoyed my visit to Marlborough Dramatic Club; this was entertainment of a high order and I suspect I was not alone in that opinion. Congratulations to all.

**Report by Stewart Adkins**