



Society : CYGNET PLAYERS
Production : "THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK"
Date : 21 February 2015
Venue : London Oratory School, Fulham
Report by : Steve Macvicar

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Thank you very much for inviting me to Cygnet Players' production of one of my favourite musicals, 'The Witches of Eastwick', recently at the London Oratory School. Thanks also to everybody who made me very welcome on the night itself.

I say that it is a favourite of mine because I loved it when I first saw it many moons ago and it doesn't get performed as much as it deserves to be these days. Clearly there are technical challenges as the audience has to believe that the three witches actually fly as well as various magical illusions. The story is an interesting one with our leads taking stock of their lives and wondering if the grass is greener elsewhere, but it is the music that is the strength for me. 'Make Him Mine', 'Something' and in particular 'Look at Me' are fabulous songs. Add this to great characters and colourful production numbers and you have the ingredients of a strong musical. Cygnets always try to pick a show which gives everyone plenty to do with ideally plenty of dancing required to it, yet another great choice.

The Eastwick townscape was nicely staged with star cloth, white syc, village perspective with a New England feel and the obligatory picket fence. Other accoutrements and flats came on and off as required all totally appropriate to the scene they were depicting.

As is the norm, the first half spends most of the time establishing characters, their relationships and setting us up nicely for the story to unfold. As well as introducing us to the main society personalities, we also meet with gusto the town's ensemble in a mesmeric opening number 'Eastwick Knows'. Centred around three ladies, the story envelopes their domestic situation and we are also introduced to their extended families with their own sub plots. Also normal for small towns, not everybody sees eye to eye and much of the comedy and action comes from these individual battles. Whilst the three ladies agree they are looking for more from life, be careful what you wish for. Apparently, from nowhere, in bursts Darryl Van Horne as a new resident, and at first he is everything the ladies collectively desire. 'Make Him Mine' is truly answered. As the first half develops, the cast expertly portray the effect Darryl is having on them individually and collectively. Each in turn he seduces them. The town is under his spell. More excellent production numbers ensue – none better than the wonderfully staged 'Dirty Laundry'.

Act 2 also flew along and we enjoyed another big number as Darryl 'educates' the men to 'grow a pair' and so he did in stonking style. Throughout the second half everybody continued to put their heart and soul into it. Gradually Darryl's influence begins to take a negative effect on Eastwick's townspeople and they hit back with magic of various kinds. The throwing up of objects by Felicia was well worked as was the voodoo doll business and eventually normality was more or less regained. The audience were clapping and stomping away. It really was a bright and lively piece which sits up there with several previous Cygnets shows. The show's final number 'Look at Me' left me in tears – these three ladies were a true triumph and all equally impressive. The production line of outstanding productions continues apace. Congratulations to all involved.

There is no doubt that Cygnet Players have come on a bundle in recent years. Each year more natural talent arrives and these talents are worked on and honed with professional style support, to bring the high standards that Cygnets are now achieving. This professional support comes this time from Jonny Clines as Director, whose passion and commitment is obvious for all to see. The cast and backstage support are all given plenty of business to do, and all aspects are performed with rehearsed precision. Cygnets are fortunate to have the talents of Sam Fisher as Musical Director. The Cygnets band were excellent and the performers well-rehearsed with many intricate harmonies well handled. Kim Findlay's choreography (assisted by Adam Walker and Dance Captain Zoe Dobell) was pleasing on the eye and was constructed in keeping with the period and mood of the production. You know a slick show is ahead when Fiona Elliot is the Stage Manager, and Witches was no different. Fiona's crew worked beautifully like mice in the dark. Lighting and Sound were equally in the safe hands of Dan Bunn and Dave Gates – a really strong balance. Costumes, Set and Props were impressive, something Cygnets have really made great strides on. I suppose everybody was waiting for the 'flying' scene and for me it worked but black wire would have such a difference.

There are far too many roles to mention everybody individually but I have made a few comments on the very main principals (whose blogs read like a lifetime in musical theatre);

Darryl Van Horne – Nick Moorhead – Nick was a revelation as Darryl who was both adept at comedy and drama in equal amounts. I thought Nick was a real livewire with a very physical performance – he was totally engaging, I loved this performance.

Alexandra Spofford – Helen Burgess-Bartlett – I enjoyed Helen's version of Alex because Helen was able to display a range of acting skills which some of her previous roles have not really allowed her to do. Allied to excellent vocals, she brought the character to life beautifully. Top leading lady quality!

Jane Smart – Charlotte Donald – These three ladies were the perfect foil for Darryl. None more so than Charlotte, who was always engaging, especially in the haunting duet 'Waiting for the Music to Begin'. The collective harmonies were excellent from all three ladies and as I've said, 'Look at Me' had me crying like a baby.

Sukie Rougemont – Rhian Roberts – Rhian equally produced strong acting skills and her vocals were highly in evidence. A lovely complement to the other ladies and collectively they were as strong as you could wish for.

Felicia Gabriel – Kate Chesworth – A complete force of nature! From the moment Kate crashed onto stage, she had the audience eating out of the palms of her hands. Kate is a natural comedian who beautifully commands a stage with sound comic timing.

Clyde Gabriel – Neil Wease – Neil was a really heart-warming Clyde. I genuinely felt sorry for him and I was glad to see he got his rage out in the open. A strangely sympathetic performance from Neil.

Jennifer Gabriel – Avril Stanford – Michael Spofford – Mark Stanford – These two young lovebirds were enthralling and looked to have great chemistry – this was of course before I found out they were actually married! I loved the duet 'Something'.

There were lots of sub principals nicely played by a variety of actors – all performed with gusto and I look forward to them taking on larger roles in the future.

Other smaller roles and townspeople added much to this lovely and lively production. I must also mention much of the support and committee who give of their time so freely and so professionally.

We can never forget the helpers who do not receive the audience applause but without them the show couldn't go on. Thanks to you all.

The souvenir programme had a really nice and substantial layout. There was lots of interesting reading and short biogs and pics are always very welcome as it shows the relevant experience and growth of performers. I couldn't see any NODA article which is a shame because the programme was of a quality to do well in the Programme Competition.

Once again thank you for inviting me to the London Oratory School and best wishes for your next production.

I look forward to seeing you again soon and if I can be of any assistance at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindest Regards

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