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theatre

Society : Cygnet Players
Production : Hairspray
Date : 20th February 2016
Venue : The London Oratory
Report by : Tony Sweeney

Show Report

GENERAL

This was the first time I had seen a show by Cygnet Players and I must say both I and my companion were very impressed with the degree of professionalism and enthusiasm shown by the cast. From start to finish this was a joy.

The cast used and maintained authentic accents which gave the feel of a local community. Sometimes groups think an American accent is sufficient but of course there are regional variations this group avoided that pitfall well.

There may be some benefit in advising the audience to switch off mobile phones not only to prevent any interruption but also to prevent photos being taken and added to the internet. With such an iconic show any such photo could lead to real difficulties with the rights holders and it's wise for groups to discourage this. Prevention is better than cure.

The whole cast seemed blessed with both singing and dancing skills which really added to the shows impact.

PLAYERS – LEADING

Melissa Cox (Tracy Turnblad) as the iconic “heroine” of the show was perfectly cast; with an excellent voice and strong acting ability, she shone in the part. As the absolute bedrock of the piece she helped make the show a real spectacular.

Sam Benton (Edna Turnblad) got the character just right, balancing it between pantomime Dame and female impersonator. This was an excellent performance of a strong character that is vital to the show's overall impact. Even when corpsing during “You're timeless to me” he managed to turn it into a moment of real comedy.

Cassie Pearson (Velma Von Tussle) as the mother of Amber gave the part real impact. Some stunning costumes and a real attitude that projected itself to the audience gave the character credibility and balance essential to the plot.

Rachel Kitchen (Penny Pingleton) as Tracy's gawky friend kept in character throughout emerging like a butterfly at the end whilst still retaining the characterisation. This is a tricky part which she totally and impressively nailed.

Sarah Thatcher (Amber Von Tussle) as the precocious Amber was again good in the character playing the spoilt little rich girl well.

Jaco Botha (Corny Collins) as the suave almost creepy TV presenter again worked hard to get the part just right, giving us a strong supportive performance.

Kob Yeboah (Seaweed J Stubbs) was really impressive in the role; a great singer and dancer, he was a huge presence on stage. Effecting an entry by crawling down the aisle almost unseen was a nice touch.

Will Prescott (Wilbur Turnblad) as Tracy's dad again seemed to inhabit the role, giving it a laid back almost resigned quality you would expect from someone dealing with two such strong characters. Again an accomplished singer, he was perfect for the role.

Jez Roberts (Link Larkin) as the leading player in his own TV show again played this supporting role well.

Chardine Wadley (Motormouth Maybelle) not only had a fabulous and strong singing voice but also had a strong stage presence which she used to draw a larger than life character to the full. This was a stunning performance.

Aimee Parnell (Prudy Pingleton) as a rather bigoted mother did well, but the age difference needed to be better developed as she seemed quite young to have a teenaged daughter. However, she threw herself into the role giving it great energy.

SUPPORT

A large and very talented chorus played a number of minor roles and gave the show context.

DIRECTOR

Damian Sandys clearly understands the show and its subtext and used all the resources available to create an excellent show which was clearly appreciated. This was demonstrated by a much deserved and prolonged standing ovation given by a very enthusiastic audience.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Christopher Peake led the band well giving us a clear sound that supported and never overwhelmed the singers.

CHOREOGRAPHER

Della Bhujoo used the dancing talent at her disposal well with some strong and vibrant dance routines that really gave impact to the show.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

The stage management was well thought out. A large cast needed to be moved on and off with almost military precision and in doing this the pace of the show was kept fast and proved effective.

SOUND

The sound was clear and audible and I'm sure added to the audience experience.

LIGHTING

The lighting was used well with some dimming of the levels when the characters were in jail helping define the moment. Having a well set up rig certainly gives you options.

MAKE-UP

The make up was used well and was quite subtle. Obviously that for Edna was of necessity a little stronger but did help convey the character.

SET DESIGN

The set was colourful and functional. I did think the bars in Tracy's cell might have been more rigid as they visibly flexed during her song.

PROPS

The props were all to hand and used well. A large TV camera worked well to add to the relevant scene. Perhaps a light on top might have added even more.

COSTUMES

Some excellent costumes drew heavily on the iconic nature of the show and which helped define the overall context. Well made and ideal this was a key part of the shows visual impact.

PROGRAMME

The programme was excellent with all the usual information and some insight into the show and its origins. Photographs included in the bios helped identify the actors and their personas. It should definitely be submitted into the Regional programme competition.

FRONT OF HOUSE

There was a little confusion at the front of house regarding my ticket but we managed to sort it out before the show started. Having a desk before the lobby was a good idea to help separate those who were booked in from those waiting to enter the auditorium. Using numbered seats was essential as it was a packed house.

Tony Sweeney
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