



Society : Cygnet Players  
Production : All Shook Up  
Date : Saturday September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Venue : Putney Arts Theatre  
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

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## Show Report

As always, it was a pleasure to have visited with Cygnet Players and this time enjoy their rendition of the highly acclaimed ‘All Shook Up’. Many thanks to Adam Walker-Galbraith for both the kind invitation and organising tickets to this performance.

‘All Shook Up’ is a light-hearted, and energetic, musical production about life, love and ‘rock & roll’. This American jukebox musical includes many iconic Elvis Presley songs together with an actual storyline that is based on William Shakespeare’s ‘Twelfth Night’.

Jamie Miller-Hughes brought both her acting experience, and first-hand knowledge of ‘All Shook Up’, to the roles of Director/Producer. Assisted by Kathryn Felton and Russell Hughes, this trio gathered a quality cast which was then carefully instructed and well-rehearsed. Attention to detail was obviously stressed as the ‘end product’ was both precise and polished. The entire show ran smoothly with no delays or distractions and the ‘full house’ witnessed a superb show. This can only be achieved with significant amounts of work from the production team.

Mike Searle is no stranger to the role of Musical Director and certainly selected a fabulous show for his first production with Cygnet Players. Rather than being situated out of sight (there is no orchestra ‘pit’ at the Putney Arts Theatre) Mike and his nine-piece band were clearly visible through a large window on a raised platform back centre stage. This instantly gave a feeling of total inclusion and brought the music into the performance. Whilst it was a fabulous idea, and visually a huge success, the level of music did overshadow vocals on numerous occasions however. The quality of the music was excellent and the timing was ‘spot on’. It was simply a case of song lyrics not being heard.

Kim Schenkelaars (Choreographer) and Aoife Considine (Assistant Choreographer) combined to ensure a huge amount of pace and energy in all dance routines. Given the number of musical numbers it must have been a challenge to choreograph each with a unique flavour and it was obvious just how much time, and effort, had gone into the preparations. Kim and Aoife must be congratulated for the precise and detailed routines and for clearly working so hard with the cast.

Barry Lattimore-Quinn took on the hugely demanding role of Chad, the hip-swiveling, guitar-playing, lady-killer who arrived in this dreary 1950’s Midwest town looking for a motorbike mechanic. Barry was on stage virtually the entire show and in addition to his acting performance seemed to also be involved in the vast majority of songs. Barry’s dancing skills and athletic movement were perfect for this high-energy role and character. This was a hugely challenging role but one Barry looked to be greatly enjoying. Overall, Barry delivered an excellent performance.

Jessica Laing gave a superb performance as Natalie/Ed – the local motorbike mechanic with a dream of one-day escaping her small town. Jessica has a fabulous singing voice, which was repeatedly demonstrated throughout the show, together with maturity, apparent ease and great humour. This type of ‘split role’ provides an additional opportunity to develop two characters and I felt Jessica handled the task thoughtfully. A fabulous, all-round performance. I most enjoyed seeing Natalie grow to ‘love’ the strong person inside herself and ultimately reject Chad for her dream of adventure.

Rob Malone gave a strong performance as Jim Haller - Natalie's father. Rob achieved just the right balance for this character showing his longing for his deceased wife and emotions for his daughter. Rob's diction was good and vocally he came across very well in his numbers. Rob also provided a convincing foil for Sylvia and I loved the rather desperate attempts to emulate Chad by returning to the biker dress of his youth.

Harriet Ruby was wonderful in the role of Sylvia, the ‘no-nonsense’ honky-tonk owner. As a single parent of a teenage daughter, and with apparently little happiness in her life, Harriet brought just the right amounts of frustration and sarcasm to her character. Excellent diction, projection and movement reflected in her overall confidence on stage. Harriet's exceptionally dynamic vocal skills captivated the audience but it was her solo, ‘There's Always Me’, that was the standout number.

Natalie Simmonds gave an excellent performance as the Sylvia's teenage daughter Lorraine. Young, in love and demonstrating all the recognisable teenage characteristics, Natalie's interpretation of the role could not be faulted. This was an assured performance and one coupled with a beautiful singing voice that was best demonstrated in ‘It's Now or Never’.

Alex Blackie demonstrated his fine character acting as ‘nerdish’ Dennis, secretly in love with Natalie but always scared to reveal his true feelings. Dennis simply reveled in his new-found role as Chad's sidekick and Alex ensured his character grew in confidence throughout the performance. Alex's general awkwardness, diction and facial expressions were great and his singing skills came to the fore in the wonderful solo ‘It Hurts Me’.

Beci Sageman gave a fabulous performance as Miss Sandra, the town's beautiful and intellectual museum caretaker. Beci ensured the right amount of sass and I loved the way she repeatedly dismissed Chad's advances and ultimately ‘fell’ for Dennis. I particularly enjoyed the relationships with Chad/Dennis/Jim and character development. ‘Let Yourself Go’ was Beci's opportunity to really demonstrate her lovely singing voice and she did so well.

Kate Chesworth brought her extensive acting prowess to the role of Matilda, the town's sexually repressed Mayor. The quality of Kate's singing, coupled with her superb stage ‘presence’ ensured this was a standout performance. It was the sheer quality of Kate's character acting that caught my eye here however. The body-language and mannerisms were fabulous and there were numerous people near me who couldn't stop laughing whenever Kate appeared. I simply loved the dance routine and singing in ‘Devil in Disguise’ which was fabulous.

Philip Ruby gave a terrific performance as Mayor Matilda's teenage son Dean who'd been firmly ‘under his mother's wing’ his entire life. Having unexpectedly found Lorraine, and love, Dean finally developed a backbone and confronted his mum in no uncertain terms.

Will Prescott filled the cameo role of Sheriff Earl and for most of the show was 'seen but not heard' as Matilda refused to let him speak... The audience was certainly caught by surprise when, just before the ending, Sherriff Earl unexpectedly spoke, confronted Mayor Hyde and professed his love for her. Some good characterisation and facial expression together with excellent timing.

Ali Coates-Newman, Ed Steward, Emma Clandon, Emma Ollis, Ewan Ridgewell, Gemma Miles, Georgie Crotty, Ian Green, Jon Bradly, Kob Yeboah, Laura Smith, Lauren O'Mara, Maggie Murray, Nika Borsic, Peter Beaven, Sally Reeve, Sinead Burniston and Stephanie Parr were the ensemble.

The ensemble's time, effort and commitment must not to be overlooked here and Cygnet Players is fortunate to have such a depth of talent to draw upon. Ensemble singing was of a high order with good entries and well balanced voices. Movement and characterisation could not be faulted and those onstage looked as if they were thoroughly enjoying themselves. In particular, the energy and dance performances in 'Jailhouse Rock', 'Devil in Disguise', 'All Shook Up', and 'Burning Love' were fabulous.

Set design/supply was by Gavin Murphy and was both simple and effective. The raised platform gave space to include the band and the two flights of stairs ensured the platform remained a strong focal point throughout. Playing to a single set, with limited props, ensured the stage remained uncluttered with focus on the cast and action. It also ensured all scene changes were swift and seamless. Congratulations to Russell Hughes (Stage Manager), Kathryn Felton (ASM), Adam Ballis, Amy Matthewson, Ben Waterhouse and Sally Bourne (Crew) who combined to ensure that everybody, and everything, was in the right place at the right time.

Costumes were managed by Kim Schenkelaars and Props were managed by Kathryn Felton. In both cases, these all appeared to be of excellent quality and appropriate for the time period and settings.

Lighting was managed by Dickson Cossar which was of a consistently high level with all cast members being clearly lit when required. Sound was managed by David Gates and proved ideal during those quieter songs and dialogue. Unfortunately, during the vast majority of louder songs many of the actual lyrics simply could not be heard. To me, this was a case of the band simply 'overplaying' the technical capabilities of the sound system.

I cannot see a credit for the show Programme but it was both attractive and well laid-out. However, I must admit to being disappointed with the choice of font style and size. Quite simply, this did not make for a comfortable pre-show read in a semi-lit auditorium. Having said that, there were some nice photographs of the cast 'on location' and it was pleasing to see the prominent NODA reference.

Congratulations to everyone involved at Cygnet Players for another first-class production. I very much look forward to being invited along to 'Shrek' in February 2020.

Des Wilby  
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