



Society : Cygnet Players
Production : Kiss Me, Kate
Date : Saturday February 23rd, 2019
Venue : London Oratory School Theatre
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It was a pleasure to have attended Cygnet Players' recent production of 'Kiss Me, Kate' at the London Oratory School. Having previously staged this show back in 2004, the society decided that a fifteen year gap was plenty of time to revive this challenging, but wonderful, musical.

'Kiss Me, Kate' offers the audience something different in that there it is effectively a 'story within a story'. The Baltimore Players are staging a somewhat bizarre musical adaptation of Shakespeare's 'The Taming of the Shrew' but various conflicts between Fred Graham, the show's director, producer, and star, and the leading lady, his ex-wife Lilli Vanessi cause unwanted problems both on and off stage. To this add various other personal problems, a sizeable gambling debt and a couple of loveable mobsters...

Phoebe Fleetham must first and foremost be congratulated for her role as Director and ensuring this production was slick, highly polished and a resounding success. Together with the capable help of Sarah Prescott (Producer) the cast had been carefully selected, meticulously rehearsed and coped extremely well with the many challenges of this production. The level of commitment demonstrated here is not something new at Cygnet Players and the results are always something to be highly commended.

James Hall excelled as Musical Director and led his twelve-piece orchestra considerately throughout the show. All music was of a high standard and perfectly in time with the singing. It was obvious considerable 'note bashing', and attention to detail, had taken place during rehearsals. I was pleased that the volume of music never overshadowed those onstage resulting in all lyrics being clearly understood.

Choreography was arranged by Vicki Rice and was simply fabulous. In a show with twenty musical numbers the amount of choreography was both impressive and exhausting to watch. Indeed, things ran so smoothly, and looked so good, one might be forgiven for thinking this had been relatively easy to arrange. However, what appeared almost effortless was definitely the result of extensive rehearsal, dedication and commitment. It was also pleasing to see all cast members being fully engaged and genuinely looking like they were having fun onstage.

Keith Walters (Fred Graham / Petruchio), Rosie Orchard (Lilli Vanessi / Kate), Joanne Frazer (Lois Lane / Bianca) and Paul Nicholas Dyke (Bill Calhoun / Lucentio) provided the principal 'line up' for this show and it was impossible to fault their performances in anyway.

Virtually on stage throughout the entire production, I was hugely impressed with the characterisation of each principal, their consistent accents and vocal ranges. They were nothing short of superb. I thoroughly enjoyed each performance and the musical numbers were fabulous. 'We Open In Venice', 'I Hate Men', 'Always True To You in My Fashion', 'Kiss Me, Kate' and 'Why Can't You Behave' were particular musical favourites.

Working extremely well together I was impressed with the pace, energy and sheer quality exhibited. It should also be stressed just how difficult it is to learn, fully understand and recite with meaning Shakespearean language in itself. Throw in American accents, together with plenty of singing and dancing, any this was a terrific effort from Keith, Rosie, Joanne and Paul. Well done and congratulations!

Will Prescott (1st Man) and Russell Hughes (2nd Man) provided additional light relief and certainly worked well together. Carefully maintaining their accents and characters throughout, their standout moment came in their duet 'Brush Up You Shakespeare'. This number can never be too OTT and their obvious enjoyment at performing onstage, together with costumes and dancers, certainly succeeded in this wonderful number.

Kob Yeboah as Paul (Fred Graham's dresser) filled this cameo role extremely well but it was his momentous song 'Too Darned Hot', accompanied by a perspiring chorus, that was simply fabulous and a terrific start to Act Two. Kob had been well cast for this role dancing and singing with aplomb.

Jason Thomas made for a fine General Howell and revealed a strong singing voice in 'From This Moment On'. "Tom Dick or Harry" was an excellent harmony number well sung by Paul Nicholas Dyke (Lucentio), Abbie Minnock (Gremio) and Kathryn Sinclair (Hortensio).

Deborah Lowe (Hattie) got the show off to a fine start with 'Another Op'nin' Another Show', Vaughan Evans (Harry Trevor / Baptista), Georgina Macfarlane (Ruth, Stage Manager) and Gina Brill (Ma) all performed well and added to the quality of this production.

Alex Johnson, Caroline Steer, Gina Brill, Harriet Ruby, Katie Scott, Maggie Murray, Nicola Wendel and Phoebe Oakey all performed well in a tight and supportive Ensemble. Demonstrating huge amounts of energy this was a lively show full of pace and fun.

Amy Matthewson (Dance Captain), Ali Coates-Newman, Flo Nash, Kim Schenkelaars, Laura Smith, Mo Rogers, Rosie Miles and Sinead Burniston all deserve a huge amount of credit for their performances as Featured Dancers. Greatly adding to the show's glamour, the dancers were polished, precise and fabulous - something I've certainly come to expect from Cygnet Players!

I would very much have liked to have been able to single out more individual performances but with the show was so entertaining it was difficult to take everything on board. However, I was aware that everyone was fully engaged throughout the production and contributed to the overall success and appeal of the show.

Chris Irving and Philip Ruby (Saturday) took on the onerous responsibility of Stage Manager for this non-stop production. Together with their first-class stage crew they ensured everything ran seamlessly and with minimal fuss. Indeed, the fact that everything ran so smoothly is testament to their backstage organisation and management.

Costumes were jointly managed by Janet Huckle / Phoebe Fleetham and assisted by Louise Bravery, Juliette Gafsen and Kasha Clifford. All costumes were of an excellent standard and appropriate for the time period and setting. Given the cast size, and number of costumes used, it must have been challenging to ensure everything was in order and that everyone was correctly dressed.

Richard Pike was responsible for the Lighting with Ben Robinson, Jake Wells and Adam Walker-Galbraith running the Follow Spots. David Gates and Dickson Cossar handled the Sound. Quite simply their overall preparation and efforts resulted in faultless technical support. When Sound and Lighting go this well it's easy to forget the hard work required to reach this level.

Sarah Prescott, Anne Pringle, Janet Huckle and Phoebe Fleetham combined to arrange a formidable array of quality Props. These were handled well and all appropriate for the setting and time period.

Will Prescott, Kim Schenkelaars and Rosie Miles were responsible for putting together a quality programme for this show. It was of a high standard and packed with so much information for the audience to enjoy reading. There were some great photographs of rehearsals, interesting cast biographies and nice 'touches' (biogs for the Ensemble and Featured Dancers were lovely). As always, it was pleasing to see the prominent NODA reference.

I'd like to suggest that Cygnet Players submit this programme into the **NODA London Poster & Programme Competition 2019**. Simply download the entry form, from the below web link, and submit together with six programmes.

<https://www.noda.org.uk/regions/london/noda-london-poster-programme-competition-2019>

'Kiss Me, Kate' is a demanding show for any society to perform. All in all, this was a sparkling and energetic production, imaginatively directed with a most talented and enthusiastic cast.

Congratulations to everyone at Cygnet Players for another huge success and good luck for the challenging 2019 schedule. I look forward to being invited to attend what I'm certain will be more highly entertaining and quality productions.

Des Wilby
Regional Representative
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