



Society : Cygnet Players
Production : Young Frankenstein
Date : February 18th, 2023
Venue : Arthur Cotterell Theatre
Report by : Des Wilby

Show Report

It was a pleasure to have once again visited with Cygnet Players and, on this occasion, enjoyed watching their highly entertaining production of *Young Frankenstein*. Not having seen the show previously I was certainly looking forward to this event. Mel Brooks adapted his 1974 film, of the same name, to create this brilliant musical comedy. He is definitely not one to be timid and the adult humour in *Young Frankenstein* is certainly no different.

When Frederick Frankenstein, grandson of the infamous Victor Frankenstein, returns to Transylvania and inherits his family's estate he meets a very strange cast of characters. Together with Igor the hunchback, Inga a gorgeous lab assistant and Frau Blucher the mysterious castle caretaker Frederick reignites his grandfather's experiment but does history repeat itself?

Alex Orchard is to be congratulated, as Director, for taking on this hugely challenging production and for delivering a truly wonderful show. Careful casting, plenty of patience and undoubtedly a lot of hard work throughout rehearsals resulted in a first-class production with so much pace, energy and non-stop action.

Once again the role of Musical Director was in the safe hands of Ashley Harvey who led her band with precision and skill. The underscore was ideal throughout the performance with all vocals being clearly audible. The quality of all singing was of the high level I've come to expect from Cygnet Players and there had obviously been much rehearsal time spent ensuring precision and accuracy in all numbers.

Vicki Smith certainly delivered as Choreographer and ensured all routines, whether individual or group, were thoughtful and appropriate. 'Puttin on the Ritz' was truly wonderful, 'Roll in the Hay' was exceptionally well delivered and the high-energy 'He Vas My Boyfriend' was hysterical. The amount, and variety, of choreography throughout was a definite highlight.

Phoebe Fleetham committed her time and effort as Producer and obviously worked extensively with the management team, technical crew and designers. It must have been pleasing to see all the hard work come together in such a fabulous production.

Taking the lead as Frederick Frankenstein was the highly talented Michael Stacey. The characterisation and physicality required for the role, coupled with the singing, dancing and comedy timing made him the perfect fit for the part, and he delivered in style.

Alex Johnston excelled as Igor and made the perfect foil for Frederick. This was a fabulous character to portray and Alex squeezed every ounce of comedy from the role. Even when not actually performing, it was quite difficult not to look at Igor and his reactions to others.

Ema-Mae West was terrific as Inga, Frederick's assistant, and she maintained a great accent throughout the show. This was a lovely character and Ema-Mae gave a convincing performance. Her vocal skills are quite exceptional and 'Roll in the Hay' was a definite show highlight.

Kate Chesworth gave another very strong performance – this time delighting as Frau Blucher. As always, Kate's acting skills were excellent but it was her solo of 'He Vas My Boyfriend' that was memorable.

Rosie Orchard was perfectly cast as Elizabeth Benning, Frederick's wealthy but cold fiancé. Rosie's understanding of this New York socialite was just the right and her rendition of 'Please Don't Touch Me' was another highlight moment.

Matt Bentley was truly excellent as The Monster. To deliver such comedy whilst not saying a single word for most of his time on stage is an absolute credit to his physical performance skills as an actor. That said, the variety of grunts and noises made were incredibly funny and certainly had the audience amused. Matt's rendition of 'Puttin on the Ritz' had to be seen to be believed.

Rob Malone gave a strong performance as Inspector Hans Kemp providing that fine link between the principals, the ensemble and the audience. Rob demonstrated a fine singing voice and his physical acting skills throughout his performance.

Finally, a special mention for Mark Hunter as the lonely, blind Hermit. 'Please Send Me Someone' both well sung and a very poignant number. A nice cameo role which Mark filled with belief.

Rea Bailey, Emma Crocombe, Emily Howe, Amy Matthewson, Sally Reeve, Tara Rogerson, Kim Schenkelaars, Laura Smith, Becky Thomas and Hillary Zondlak added to this production as Featured Dancers. Aimee Batchelor, Alasdair Beddow, Alex Blackie, Jon Bradley, Daniella Gambier, Phoebe Hitt, Ross Martin and Katie Sterland completed the ensemble and provided excellent support to the principals ensuring depth and energy at all times.

Set design was by Alex Orchard and was terrific. The rear-stage projection provided a wonderful focal point and greatly helped to 'move the story along'. The uncluttered stage, revolving secret door and quality laboratory equipment were all highly effective. As a result, set changes were swift and uncomplicated.

Phillipa Stone took on the duties of Stage Manager. Assisted by Kay Rose, and a very efficient stage crew, everything ran smoothly allowing the show to run without delays or distractions. All props were moved with minimal disruption and the end result was a performance that simply flowed. Excellent use was made of the cast to aid in scene changes and this certainly helped to keep the performance moving.

Costumes were jointly managed by Phoebe Fleetham and Jan Huckle who together assembled quality items that were ideal for the time period and setting. Props were managed by Anne Pringle and Phoebe Fleetham. Again, these were of a high standard and appropriate for the time period and setting.

Lighting Design was by Andy James and of a consistently high standard. Not only were all the cast appropriately well-lit whilst onstage but the laboratory special effects were quite excellent. The rear-stage projections provided so much atmosphere to the show and quickly allowed the scenes to change and performance to flow. Sound Design was by James Rodgers and Steve Lonsdale who ensured everything worked well with all speaking and singing being clearly audible. There were no issues with the music overshadowing actors and the stage/individual mic's worked well indeed.

Alex Blackie is to be congratulated for designing an excellent programme that was filled with information for the audience to enjoy reading. There were some great cast and production team biographies. It was also pleasing to see the programme so well supported by advertisers and, of course, the prominent NODA reference.

Congratulations again to everyone at Cygnet Players and especially to those directly involved with *Young Frankenstein*. I left feeling thoroughly entertained by this excellent production. The cast fully embraced the musical and handled those risqué parts of the script with good-taste and humour.

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