

Society : Cygnet Players
Production : Big Fish
Date : Saturday, 10th September
Venue : Putney Arts Centre
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It is always a pleasure to visit with Cygnet Players and enjoy watching a society delivering such a consistently high level of entertainment. Originally scheduled for February 2020, and repeatedly postponed ever since, this musical had thus been in the production pipeline for almost three years.

Big Fish revolves around the relationship between Edward Bloom, a travelling salesman, and his adult son Will, who looks for what is behind his father's tall stories. The story shifts between two timelines. In the present-day real world, Edward Bloom faces his mortality while his son, Will, prepares to become a father himself. With a Witch, a Giant, a Mermaid, and the love of his by his side, *Big Fish* promised to be a blend of fairytale, romance and adventure...

As the auditorium lights dimmed, a succinct announcement was made regarding the recent death of Her Majesty the Queen. This was followed by a two-minute silence that was impeccably observed throughout the audience. A very poignant, and much appreciated gesture, by Cygnet Players.

Kathryn Felton deserves huge credit as Director. This was a truly heart-warming show that had been delivered by an exceptionally strong cast. The energy, pace and joy shown by all performing was infectious. I cannot understand why *Big Fish* isn't staged more frequently as this really was an exceptional show. From a design and staging perspective, the concepts were simple but elegantly executed by the seamless incorporation of projections.

Ashley Harvey is to be congratulated as Musical Director and for leading a quality band. The singing from all cast and chorus was first-rate and Ashley had obviously had given good, clear direction as each song was very well delivered. The music in this show was carried out beautifully with some extremely emotional solos and wonderful full-cast numbers.

Congratulations must be given to Gemma Miles who, as Choreographer, ensured this production delivered plenty of lively action and quality dance routines. The pace was fast, the dance routines varied and everyone onstage genuinely looked like they were having fun. A special note to Kiera Lockard who, as Dance Captain, helped ensure that all directions from Gemma were transferred to the stage successfully.

Lisa Baltovich committed her time and effort as Production Manager 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.

The quality of acting from the principal line-up was phenomenal and this was achieved whilst maintaining some fantastic southern draws. *Big Fish* included plenty of really emotional moments and without such strong acting the impact would have been greatly reduced. The standard of vocals was equally impressive and also deserves special recognition.

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Juan Miralles gave an excellent performance as the charming and charismatic Edward Bloom. Happier joking and creating elaborate stories than facing reality, Juan brought a depth of mystery to this character whose true identity was only revealed in his final moments. This was a role full of humour and pathos that evoked much audience emotion. Edward's fight with, and eventual loss to, cancer was sensitively handled and believable.

Tom Cane gave a very strong portrayal of a Young Edward Bloom that was full of energy and enthusiasm. Tom managed to capture all the nuances of a high school hero and a romantic in this character. Jack Kenny handled the vital role of Will Bloom exceptionally well as both a thoughtful, and serious, young man who strove to reconnect with his storytelling father. Kate Vlietstra was delightful as Sandra Bloom and ensured her character proved to be an excellent balance for her husband's enthusiasm. Always calm and patient, Sandra strove to bring reconciliation to her husband and son, both of whom she loved.

Hannah McKenna Vickerstaff was delightful as the sweet and innocent Young Sandra Bloom. Smitten by Young Edward and excited by the possibilities of life. Abbie Minnock gave a sensitive performance as Josephine acted as the bridge between Edward and Will, explaining the deeper meaning of the stories. Beth Owen gave a strong performance as Jenny, Will's high school sweetheart. The additional challenge of playing an older version of this character was equally well handled.

Strong supporting cameo roles were provided by Daniella Gambier (Witch), Jason Thomas (Dr. Bennett), Claire Wimbush (Ms. Calloway), Phil Ruby (Don Price), Sam Matthews (Zacky Price), Mark Hunter (Giant) and Emma Crocombe/JJ Lam (Lambs). 'The Witch' was a fabulous number and sung with real strength by Daniella Gambier and 'Closer to her' was likewise, a terrific number and sung by Claire Wimbush. The accompanying choreography, and quality of dancing, was a visual treat to enjoy.

Paul Guntrip filled the role of Young Will during this performance and looked both comfortable and assured on stage. One to watch for the future...

Whilst those with principal and cameo roles enjoy 'the limelight', it is important to recognise the energy, commitment and quality demonstrated by the entire Cygnet Company. Aneka Crawley, Aoife McDermott, Emma Fleming, Izzy O'Flanagan, Keira Lockard, Lauren Cronin, Nicola Morgan, Nika Borsic, Phoebe Hitt, Sinead Burniston, Sophie Lee and Tara Rogerson provided quality support in both the action and musical numbers.

The entire cast worked well together and the whole-company numbers were full of energy, pace and enjoyment. The costumes, colour and overall spectacle from the entire cast were simply fabulous. I was aware that everyone was fully engaged throughout the performance and greatly contributed to the overall success of the show.

Mark Boardman is to be congratulated as Stage Manager. It is crucial that everything should be highly organised and runs smoothly – and it certainly did. A special mention to the busy stage crew and their seamless precision in keeping the action moving.

Phoebe Fleetham, assisted by Kathryn Felton and Gemma Miles, sourced a wonderful selection of quality costumes. These formed a massive part of this show and it was terrific to see so much variety and carefully selected outfits. Lisa Batts sourced by Antelope Theatre.

Miles, sourced and managed Props which were of a good quality and handled well.

Richard Pike (lighting) and Dickson Cossar (sound) are once again to be credited for their technical efforts. There were no issues to mention which is not as easy, or as common, as you might suppose. Jenna Rogers was responsible for the rear-stage projection that was used instead of an actual set.

Jenna Rogers is to be congratulated for delivering an exceptional programme that included some terrific photographs of rehearsals together with great cast biographies. It was also pleasing to see the programme so well supported by advertisers and, of course, the prominent NODA reference.

I would like to suggest that Cygnet Players submit this programme into the **NODA London Poster & Programme Competition 2022-2023**. The current competition period runs from 1st January 2022 to 31st December 2022 and the deadline for entries is 31st January 2023. Simply download the entry form, from the below web link, and submit together with five programmes.

<https://www.noda.org.uk/regions/london/noda-london-poster-programme-competition-2023>

Congratulations to everyone involved and for delivering another high quality production. For a show that included such a sensitive topic as cancer, *Big Fish* struck a careful balance between being emotional and fun – something that is so often hard to achieve. This was a feel-good show and one I greatly enjoyed watching. I look forward to visiting next February for your production of *Young Frankenstein*.

Des Wilby
Regional Representative
NODA London District 3

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