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Society : Cygnet Players  
Production : Fame: The Musical  
Date : Friday 16<sup>th</sup> February  
Venue : John Mackintosh Theatre  
Report : Stuart James

[Show Report](#)

### General

What a delight to revisit the Fame: The Musical as my first Cygnet Players production as District 3 Rep. Having done the rounds both professionally and via amateur productions, Fame is a much-loved show and it's always a pleasure seeing this gem again.

### Director

**Phoebe Fleetham** (Director) and **Caroline Steersmith** (Asst. Director) directed the large cast well. The audience understood the overall story and the characters were well crafted and believable. Comedic moments were hammed up appropriately while the more serious aspects of the story (Carmen and Tyrone's story arches) were handled with dignity and care creating some very touching moments.

### Musical Director

Fame: The Musical's pop/rock score was handled extremely effectively by Musical Director **Ashley Harvey** and Asst. Musical Director **Joana Cheng**. The cast performed the songs with confidence, all harmonies and lyrics were audible and the band performed with finesse throughout.

Vocally Fame: The Musical is a challenging show. However, under the guidance of **Harvey** and **Cheng** songs such as Miss Sherman's These Are My Children and the sustained notes of Carmen's In LA sounded healthy and on voice.

Dynamics during group numbers could have been played with more to allow for a varied sound scape, especially during the first number. For example, having the "I'm alive..." parts where they run forward in the choreography matched with a fortissimo vocal moment may have added an extra kick and I encourage both **Harvey** and **Cheng** to explore dynamics more in future productions.

### Choreographer

Choreographer **Kim Schenkelaars** and Asst. Choreographer **Lauren Cronin** created some fantastic moments onstage. Fame: The Musical is a massive dance show and I'm happy to say that each number was well planned and executed with onstage spacing of the large cast handled effectively. Utilising the casts strengths, ballet, jazz and hip-hop combined to create an exciting varied choreography. I also enjoyed the use of 80s choreography and I noticed a nod to Cats, which shows the choreographers were aware of the era they were choreographing for. For future productions, I encourage the choreographing team to work with the cast on their overall presentation to ensure the emotion of the dance is connected to the choreo. For example, having a smiling cast with eye brows lifted would have elevated dance numbers and added an extra oomph to the production.

## Players

**Tara Blackburn** (Serena Katz) gave a brilliant performance. Her Serena was a young woman discovering herself throughout the course of the show. Blackburn performed Serena's signature numbers Lets Play A Love Scene and Think of Meryl Streep with a powerful vocal and provided some comedic moments as her frustration towards Nick boiled over at the top of Act Two.

**Alex Johnston** (Nick Piazza) gave a confident performance. Nick takes himself very seriously and Johnston depicted this characteristic well. Giving a strong vocal performance throughout, Johnston's rendition of Nick's I Want To Make Magic during the first act was delightful.

**Cristobal Gomez Vera** (Joe Vegas) gave a spirited performance. Joe is the quintessential horny teenager in Fame: The Musical and Vera looked to be having a lot of fun. As the most energetic performer onstage, the audience's eye was drawn to him throughout. His rendition of Can't Keep It Down early in the first act was energetically on point.

As the heart of Fame: The Musical, Carmen Diaz is a difficult character to play and **Adrianna Cordero-Marino** gave a captivating performance. Her characterisation was believable throughout and her In LA was heart-wrenchingly beautiful. Special mention goes to her vocal prowess sustaining those held notes!

**Ruben Ondo Mesa** (Tyrone Jackson) gave a strong performance. Emoting well throughout, Mesa explored a full range of emotion allowed of his character and portrayed Tyrone's journey with grace. His Tyrone's Rap was an energetic cry for equality and his Dancin' on the Sidewalk, a joy.

**Lucy Parfitt** (Iris Kelly) gave a lovely performance. Her talent for dance was immediately apparent and her characterisation of the young dancer was very charming. I believed that she cared for Tyrone and wanted the best for him.

**Petro Hajj** (Schlomo Metzenbaum) gave a fantastic performance. Genuinely caring for Carmen, Metzenbaum has to eventually let her go and Hajj created a wonderfully subtle performance that was extremely touching. His duet with Carmen on Bring On Tomorrow showed off his voice and I found myself wishing to hear more of it.

**Ruth Furber** (Grace Lambchops Lamb) gave an entertaining performance as the outspoken and fun-loving Lambchops. Always handy with a rimshot, Furber looked to be having a ball with this quirky character.

**Jamie Wright** (Goodman Goody King) gave a charming performance. Goody is always the jokester and Wright portrayed him with a delightful sense of fun.

**Rosie Miles** (Mabel Washington) gave a lively performance and her gospel-inspired act two Mabel's Prayer was a very fun moment.

**Amy Matthewson** (Miss Sherman) gave an affecting performance. As the hardened school teacher, Miss Sherman plays out mainly in Tyrone's story and I really believed Matthewson's portrayal. The audience could tell her Miss Sherman really cared about her students and her eleven o'clock hour *These Are My Children* was sublime. Brava!

**Emma Gemoli** (Miss Bell) gave a delightful performance. Championing Tyrone throughout, Gemoli's Miss Bell was strong willed and her powerful vocal provided the audience with a glimpse of Bells background in the exciting duet *Teacher's Argument*.

**Lara Holden** (Ms Sheinkopf) gave a hilarious performance. Only having a few spoken lines, Holden made a meal out of all of them. Merging modern comedic timing with the scripted lines, Holden was able to craft a Sheinkopf that was unforgettable.

**Georgina Macfarlane** (Ms Myers) gave a performance filled with empathy. The audience warmed to her early on during Joe's famous *Can't Keep It Down* number and this warmth extended into act two when she confronts Carmen as she prepares to leave PA. A wonderful performance of the compassionate teacher.

### **Acting, Dance and Music Students**

An ensemble of acting, dance and music students all performed well. Solo moments in dance numbers and vocal moments to shine were given throughout and all actors should be proud of their fun performances: Alice Beaumont, Angelia Benjamin, Chloe Lane, Ellen Steel, Ellis Barrett, Emma Recknell, Emma Robinson, Eoin McCaffrey, Erin Lawlor, Esther Platt, Izzy O'Flanagan, Jake Mckerell, Laura Martin, Kaura McGlenaghan, Laura Smith, Lorna Wills, Lucy Parfitt, Marie Spicq, Milly Dalzell, Siana French and Tara Rogerson.

### **Costumes**

**Phoebe Fleetham** and **Jan Huckle**'s costumes were basic but effective giving an example of everyday 80s wear as apposed to the iconic high fashion 80s we think of when remembering this era. It's a performing arts school after all, not a fashion school. However, it would have been nice to see some high fashion pieces (possibly for the teachers) and stereotypical 80s wear (leg warmers, wrist/head bands, Choose Life t-shirts) to firmly set the show in the 80s.

### **Set**

**Dave Dee Events Ltd.** presented a simple two storied scaffold structure. Adorned with painted brickwork, the band was placed on the scaffoldings top level and the bottom level allowed actors to be above the main stage level. The blackboard/locker combination was an extremely effective way of allowing for quick scene changes. It would have been nice to have stairs from the bottom scaffolding level lead directly onto the main stage level as actors had to effectively leave the stage into the wings to get onto the main stage level. This cut scenes and took the audience out of the story. Having the scaffolding set at the back of the stage and cutting off into the wings made it look flat and uninviting for the audience, instead it would have been nice to have set elements extend to either side of the stage or have the blackboard positioned at the front. Something to immerse the audience into the set at the back. While a fun easter egg, posters for *Once* (an upcoming Cygnets Players show) were placed on the brickwork of the set, taking the audience out of the story set in the 80s.

### **Stage Management**

Stage Manager **Kay Rose** worked behind the scenes with her stage crew **Ben Waterhouse, Georgian Turner** and **Tatyana Lowed-Spence** to create a seamless production. Scene changes were quick and transitions simple. A well-oiled machine!

### **Sound Design**

**David Gate's** sound design was extremely effective. The mix with the band was excellent which meant all lyrics were audible, however some dialogue queues were missed. Fun 80s music played as pre-show music which helped to create a wonderful atmosphere in the John Mackintosh Theatre.

### **Lighting Design**

**Andy James, Jon Hains** and **Dickson Cossar** lighting was also very effective. Ensuring all actors were lit throughout and providing pre-show and intermission states to again add to the overall atmosphere. Some of the transitions into songs after scenes were unnecessarily jarring. For future productions, I encourage the person plotting to look at smoother transitions between scenes and songs so they seamlessly merge.

### **Programme**

**Alex Blackie's** programme had an eye-catching front page presented as the class of 24's yearbook. While a fun reference to this production being performed in 2024, with Once posters displayed on the set and not very 80s specific costumes, it had me wondering if the production was set in the 80s or modern day. Advertisements for future Cygnet shows were featured as well as cast and crew bios with accompanying pictures. Show promo photography was utilised well throughout the programme and a song list, information about Cygnets and NODA were also included. Overall, a lovely keepsake from a fun show.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

I commend Cygnet Players for casting this production of Fame: The Musical authentically. Cygnet Players have a wonderful commitment to Diversity and Inclusion (as displayed on your website). While this commitment was executed on your promotional social media pictures with the inclusion of cast and crew pronouns, it would have also been nice to see this extended to your show programme where sadly, they were not included. For future productions, I would also suggest having your diversity statement included in your programme on the "A Bit About Cygnet Players" page.

### **Production Summary**

Cygnet Players production of Fame: The Musical was a fantastic care-free evening out at the theatre. Enthusiastically received by the audience, the atmosphere created by this production was fun and put everyone in the party mode. Cygnet Players should be extremely proud of this production and I can't wait to see their exciting upcoming season. This production of Fame: The Musical was the perfect antidote to the daily grind of the week!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stuart James". The signature is stylized, with a large, sweeping initial "S" that loops around the first few letters of the first name.

Stuart James  
NODA London Regional Representative District 3