



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Panda Players
Production : Goodnight Mister Tom
Date : 12 March 2016
Venue : The Elgiva Theatre, Chesham
Report by : Judith Watsham

Show Report

Thank you to Helen Turner and the front of house staff for your very warm welcome and refreshments.

Until I received your invitation to report on this show I had not realised that what I thought was a straight play, with a very powerful story, had been adapted and had metamorphosed into a musical. Some of the music worked very well, especially in Act I, but this seemed to be a very difficult sing in view of the fact that so many of the complex numbers were sung by children. However, I am not here to report on the writing of the piece but rather on the way that you, Panda Players, your director, Amber Dye, and your MD, Lou Willis, presented it.

Amber's direction was sure. I know the rehearsal period was short, and double casting in two cases obviously meant a lot of hard work had to be done with the four boys concerned. However, you pulled it off successfully – very well done.

Lou Willis, your new MD, had obviously worked you all very hard to achieve the standard you did; again double casting and the need for adequate rehearsal time for all four boys must have meant a lot of extra work.

Paul Lunnon's set was excellent. The 3-part revolve worked smoothly and resulted in very slick scene changes for Stage Manager Adam Stephenson and the crew. The audio visuals dovetailed in very well with the action and provided a lot of interesting extra information which I know was appreciated by the younger members of the audience for whom the period is now studied as history, unlike those of us who were born rather closer to the Second World War!

Props, credited to Suzie Turner, were all appropriate to the period and the interior scenes were well dressed.

Helen Turner and Frances Newman produced some really excellent costumes very reminiscent of the period. Just one small comment; when Zac returned after he had been blown up his make-up had been adjusted to show dirt and blood but his costume was still pristine. I realise that with two boys sharing the role you would have had to supply two more identical outfits, this time dirty and torn, and I suspect that the reason may have been that you had a short time to source very many costumes.

Amelia Ball's make up was in period and the additions to Zac, as already mentioned, were very good. There was no separate credit in the programme for hair but the ladies' styles were without exception in period. Well done on this aspect.

Both lighting, Andy Friedli and his team, and sound, Andrew Felix with his team, were excellent. The balance between the musicians and singers worked well.

The programme, credited to 'martiarts' (aka David Martin I think?) was very impressive – Nick White's photos were good and I liked the inclusion of some period photographs and posters.

The children, and there were quite a lot of you, were all very, very good, well rehearsed and confident. Those of you who had small speaking parts were clear and we heard every word. There are, of course, the two roles

which are not small – and these were double cast. I saw Alex Bree as William and Laurence Hockey as Zac but at other performances Sam Dell and Cooper Edwards took the roles – I am very sorry boys that I did not see either of you but I have heard that your performances too were excellent.

Alex acted well but obviously you had severe problems with the many musical numbers due to the fact that your voice is in the process of breaking. However your acting was very good and you carried off the musical numbers well.

Laurence as the cheeky little Jewish extrovert, Zacharius Wrench, sang and acted well. Your infectious grin endeared you to the audience too.

David Martin in the title role was always completely in character with excellent facial expressions, acting and singing very well indeed. You maintained your country accent well too.

Martha Beech, played by Frances Sones, acted very well and you gave us a very believable character slowly and surely going mad. However, I think you were slightly out of your comfort zone in some of the musical numbers and I would imagine that the fact that the company and its directors had a shorter than usual rehearsal period meant that there was no time for some one-to-one work with the MD?

All the adult members of the ensemble played several named roles. You were all always in character with appropriate movements and costumes; you all reacted to what was going on around you and dealt with what was a times a rather difficult score with great aplomb. Although it would be invidious to single out individuals, I want to mention two characterisations which added to the humour of the piece; James Moorcroft's very officious Warden, going to great lengths to detect a chink of light was one and the other was Lydia Ridout's bus conductress whose movements really produced the impression of a moving bus bouncing over pot holes.

All in all a most enjoyable afternoon and my apologies for the delay – caused by my unplanned stay in hospital which was followed by a preplanned holiday. However, I have finally caught up and hope to do better if you invite me to your next show!

Judith Watsham
Regional Rep NODA London 11A

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