

Chesham Musical Theatre Company
My Fair Lady by Lerner & Loewe
29th April 2006
The Elgiva Theatre Chesham
Stephen Jarrett area rep 11A

An overview

Thank you for inviting me to come and see your latest production, "My Fair Lady" a favourite of mine and I am sure many of you. I nearly didn't come as I have been abroad and only arrived back after overnight travel and was very tired but Paul Woodstock encouraged me to come and see something special and I could not refuse – and boy, am I glad I did.

I have acted and sung since I was a wee lad and have directed many many times and I have been a NODA rep for many years in different areas and have adjudicated, but for me, this was the best show I have seen on an amateur stage and it beats many things I have seen on the professional stage.

In the interval I said to someone if you were watching this quality in the West End and you had paid £30, you would still be saying this was an excellent show.

If someone reads this crit who did not see the show, or at least the Saturday night performance I witnessed, they will think I have gone mad, and will never believe this report.

For a local amateur group to have cast a show without a real weak link is unheard of, to then do it to a West End standard has lottery odds but then to have a leading man and lady who are equal to or better than Rex Harrison and Audrey Hepburn is unheard of and therefore the NODA rep has gone mad!

It was that good!

Yes, there are things you could have done differently or better, but when a show is good you stop looking for the weaknesses, when a show is poor you keep finding more and more things wrong.

Jeremy Mills was more Harrison than Harrison. Danielle Owens was deeper, funnier and just more than Audrey Hepburn was.

Somehow – you got everything in harmony, the set, the costumes, the cast, the direction, the choreography, the lighting, the props, the music and the singing.

Wow! I hope you have videoed this show and I hope you videoed the Saturday night performance; for educational and learning use only!

(The usual format has gone from this critique.)

Danielle Owens performance will be nominated for an award by NODA; I cannot guarantee that she will win as a committee based on our reports, but her Act 1 performance was the best I have ever seen and her Act 2 performance was the second best I have ever seen – and I did tell her that on the night.

Jeremy's performance was so good that it too deserves an award, as does the costumes – especially for the Ascot scene. The care in choosing the black, white and

grey and the quality of these costumes was out of this world.

The quality of the music lead by Carole King was just superb – the best I have heard at the Elgiva. The music, the band and the singing was just lovely.

The chorus was just wonderful and I have to mention John Fox who stood out with a voice of real quality.

Loz Asher as Freddy was lovely, Anthony Ogden as Pickering was a terrific foil for Higgins and this underplaying which is a generous talent to have, allows others to shine. Susie Ogden as Mrs. Pearce was wonderful and one particular moment was her eyes and facial mask when Higgins sang "Why can't women be like men?"

Peter Broom's interpretation of Doolittle was so Stanley Holloway, he was the only character who pushed the role towards farce, and this really worked because no one else did, it stood alone. The rhythm of the regular sniffs and laughs was how Holloway did it. Every character he played, he played right up to the limit of farce, from Long John Silver to Doolittle with this stereotypical approach. If the character had to say, "Ha-arh!" out of the side of the mouth, he would then do this over and over again. If you ask anyone to do an imitation of LJS, they copy Holloway – no one else!

Jenny Crumpton was wonderful as Higgins's mother.

Nicky Hinkley's choreography was fantastic with some simple, some innovative and creative settings and use of movement and props which just added to the visual spectacular.

Where do I stop?

What would I have done differently or didn't I like?

I still don't like the walkway – last used in Oliver, I think? Either make it flatter and use it more – or don't have it. You used it here and there and it was quite nice but you need to make a decision either to use it all the time or get rid of it. It had the effect of pushing the cast back away from us.

Behind the pros arch you still have problems with the sound.

One piece of advice which both actors will ignore and then later regret, as I did! Is to go and do these roles again now, with other groups, further a field, while you still can, for Danielle it is a window of maybe 5 years. For Jeremy it is maybe 10 years. Most of us say, "I only do a role once!" That happened to me twice before; the only two good things I ever did! I never reprised the roles and I have only ever regretted it since; as I am now a fat 45 year old, who wishes he could still play parts for 20 year olds.

And lastly, never be tempted to try and go back and do it, once too old! A few years ago I had the misfortune to see a 65 year old, play Maria in the sound of music and it was very sad for the actress and audience and very hard work for make-up!

Congratulations to all concerned for a wonderful, wonderful show!!!!!!
Well done again !!!!

Stephen Jarrett

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