



Society : Maidenhead Musical Comedy Society
Production : **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**
Date : Saturday 30th November 2013
Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidenhead
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

I was very pleased to be invited to watch the last evening performance of MMCS's autumn musical, *A Christmas Carol*. This was performed a few weeks later than normal to attract the Christmas audience, and given the near capacity, it was a good decision.

This is not a musical I have come across before and, given that it is written by Walt Disney's Alan Menken then I am surprised that it is not more often performed. It has catchy tunes and offers some wonderful opportunities to all ages.

This performance involved over 50 people providing opportunities to young and old alike. The show was delivered at an excellent pace on the evening I watched, with good quick changes from scene to scene, good entrances and exits. The dancing looked extremely well rehearsed with some interesting variations that were effective to watch and I am sure enjoyable to perform.

PAUL FREEMAN (Scrooge)

Paul provided an excellent interpretation of Dickens' well known miser. He captured the meanness of the character perfectly and managed to provide the contrast at the end of act two for his transformation. During the ghost scenes, we saw a glimpse of his youth and Paul showed considerable tenderness and almost childlike qualities of his character. His singing was wonderfully observed.

DAREN BRANDON (Marley)

This is a lovely characterisation by Daren. The grey makeup was very well applied and certainly enhanced the character. *Link by link* was very well sung by Daren (and the other ghosts). Very expressive arms, that was used to very good effect.

GEMMA HOUGH (Ghost of Christmas Past)

I have always been impressed with Gemma's performances and this was no exception. Her interpretation of the Ghost of Christmas Past was wonderfully observed. I enjoyed the song *The lights of long ago* which was excellently sung.

BARRIE SCOTT (Ghost of Christmas Present)

Barrie always performs a good character part and this was no exception as he treated us to an enjoyable role of the Ghost of Christmas Present.

WENDY McDONALD-GIBSON (Ghost of Christmas Yet To Be)

Along with all the other ghosts, Wendy's performance could not be faulted. Well done.

GARETH WATKINS (Mr Cratchit)

SALLY SHARP (Mrs Cratchit)

Gareth gave a good understanding of the role of Mr Cratchit. I liked the good use of the sneeze in the first scene! Sally performed her role very well, with nice characterisation. These two produced believable roles, showing genuine affection to all their children and tremendous patience to Scrooge.

MATTHEW ASH (Mr Fezziwig)

DIANNE FARMILOE (Mrs Fezziwig)

These were two very nice characters that were well defined by Matthew and Diane as the Fezziwigs. Their song, *Mr Fezziwig's Annual Christmas Ball*, was very enjoyable.

RYAN STEVENS (Fred)

I have seen Ryan a couple of times now, and on this occasion he looked exceptionally comfortable as the good natured Fred. It was a lovely part that felt very genuine. Ryan once again produces a fine singing voice that appears effortless!

JAMIE WATKINS (Tiny Tim)

This was a lovely performance by Jamie as Cratchit's youngest son, Tiny Tim. Jamie sang superbly and looked very comfortable on stage, considering he was being carried up and down stairs on someone's shoulders! So many young people tend to rush their lines but I was pleased to hear that Jamie's pace of line delivery was very well observed as I heard every single word. WELL DONE.

CHORUS

It was lovely to see so many people on stage and all enjoying themselves. Straight from the opening number it seemed that this was a show that everyone wanted to enjoy. Characters were well maintained throughout and I thought there was a good sense of togetherness by the chorus. Songs were sung very well, I heard every word, and very well balanced. Exits and entrances were well observed, with everyone knowing what they are doing. In a production with so many people it is very difficult to mention everyone, but I do have to single out CHRIS BAISTER, as the young Ebenezer and EMMA SEYMOUR (Emily) who wonderfully sang *A Place Like Home (reprise)* in act one scene seven. I noticed that there was a very quick costume change for the dancers in scene 10, all of which was achieved impeccably. Well done!

JOHN TIMEWELL (Director)

I am sure John is very pleased with the outcome of this show, as he should be. The show was very well cast and with all characters understood and clearly defined. Movement around stage was clear, which is quite a feat when you have around 50 people on it! It never looked cramped or congested which is a compliment to the skill of the director. I liked the use of the balcony which gave opportunities for different levels to be explored and used. Although I felt Scrooge and the ghost walking through the dances looked a little odd, I did like the way they joined in with the dancing, giving the audience an opportunity of seeing what Scrooge is really like. I also liked the choreography that left Emily and Scrooge in the middle about to propose. It looked natural and set the scene perfectly. Congratulations on an excellent production.

NEIL MATTHEWS (Musical Director)

It could not have been easy to blend all the different ages and voices, but this was a triumph as I thoroughly enjoyed these songs, ones that I had previously never heard. The balance between the singers was very good and the balance between singers and orchestra was always in control.

JENNIFER SCOTT (Choreographer)

All the dances looked very well rehearsed indeed. They all were interesting visually and I am sure fun to rehearse. It incorporated different styles (including a very good tap dance section) and the end of act two looked exceptionally energetic.

Set (BRUCE SMITH)

An interesting set design with a rostrum with two sets of steps (either side of the rostrum). I liked the additional details given to the set, for example the use of Christmas trees hanging on the back. The use of a sliding platform in the centre of the stage was used to efficiently to minimise time taken to change scenes. This certainly helped keep the pace of the production moving swiftly and it was a novel and effective idea.

Stage Manager (TREVOR BAGLEY)

The stage looked very well managed on the evening I watched, with quick scene changes that kept the pace going very well.

Sound (BRIAN COX)

Although there were a few sound issues on my visit (with Fred and the “blind woman”) overall the effects were on cue and balanced very well. The use of the chains sound effect created a ghoulish and appropriate atmosphere to Marley’s scene.

Lighting Design & OPERATOR (JIM BIRNEY)

Good use of lighting throughout this production. The idea to spotlight the children on the balcony was effective, as it allowed the audience to keep focus on the scene. The graveyard scene (scene 11) was very well lit, creating a good atmosphere but enough light to see what is going on.

Makeup

Overall the makeup was very well applied, and with the ghosts in particular, great care, detail and attention had been given to an excellent effect. I did feel that the children in the opening scene should have been a little bit “grubby”, with a little black makeup on hands and faces. It was good to see that thought had been given to hair – with both men and girls (with their ringlets) looked very much part of the period. Sometimes this is overlooked but it does make such a difference.

Costumes (JENNIFER SCOTT and SUE GREENWOOD)

The range of costumes for this large cast was very well sourced/made by the wardrobe personnel. They looked appropriate to the Victorian period. I particularly liked the use of colours, with “the players” for example in their red and green outfits. The costumes for the ghosts were very good and suitable to the production. The costumes for the ball looked fabulous!

Props (PAM PITTS)

A good range of props and mostly looked appropriate to the period, however, I did note the green tape around the mops, which I am sure would have not been there in this period. All the other props looked to be in place and relevant to the scene or action.

Projections (RYAN STEVENS)

The use of animated projections was an interesting and effective idea. I liked the opening water droplets sequence, and the presentation of chains. The images being shown in black and white gave it a ghostly feel, that I am sure was the desired effect.

Programme

The 22 A5 programme had a colour cover and middle page. It contained all the necessary information, a cast list, a list of scenes and musical numbers, a synopsis and very good black and white cast head shots. The biographies were interesting.

I thoroughly enjoyed this production and look forward to seeing their next two productions in 2014 - *The King and I* and *Anything Goes*, two of my favourite musicals.

Gordon Bird
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