



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Reading Operatic Society
Production : Sister Act
Date : Friday 30th September
Venue : The Hexagon Theatre - Reading
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

I was delighted to be invited to review Reading Operatic Society's latest offering of the newly released Sister Act. This was the first time I had seen a stage production of the 90's comedy movie and enjoyed every moment of this upbeat energetic performance.

Sarah Wernér – (Deloris van Cartier) – For a young lady that has never performed before this was an excellent debut, which showed great potential I would like to see her grow in confidence which would enhance her performance greatly. There were times when she was not involved in the action that she dipped out of character, however she had moments of sheer brilliance; being brash sassy and full of pizzazz. Dialogue was clear and well projected, despite the strong accent essential for the role; and her timing was great. Vocally there were times when she needed to get on top of the note; but that said her singing was punchy and dynamic and movement lithe and fluid. She was most at ease and “in the zone” when performing with the Nuns and her “Raise Your Voice” and “Take Me To Heaven” were superlative.

Kate Boswell – (Michelle)

Sophie Fullbrook – (Tina)

Monisha Gower – (Brandy)

Yvonne Newton – (Suki) – This quartet made an excellent backing group for Deloris. They worked exceedingly well together with super movement and harmonious vocals. They had delightful facial expressions and the dialogue they had was delivered clearly and audibly with good accents.

Paul Freeman – (Curtis) – I really enjoyed this performance! Characterisation was sharp suave and urbane with vivid charismatic dialogue. His movement and actions mirrored his character displaying powerful spirited qualities. His singing was accomplished with a naturally effortless baritone voice; most pleasing to the ear. “When I Find My Baby” was well sung humorous and lively.

Eli Johnson – (TJ) - This was fine performance by this young man. He worked really well with Joey and Pablo displaying excellent interaction and rapport. His characterisation of the rather dumb nephew of Curtis was spot on and his comic timing perfect. “Lady in the Long Black Dress” was a highlight of the evening

George Apap – (Ernie) – It was a shame this chap didn't last very long before being shot! His dialogue was well delivered with good projection being nervous and jittery as was his movement; perfect for the character.

Jesse Buchan – (Joey) – This was another strong characterisation; interacting brilliantly with his two cohorts. His dialogue and visuals were outstandingly animated and his movement naturally fluid. I really enjoyed his interpretation of his part in “Lady in the Long Black Dress” which was superbly sung.

Andrew Clarke – (Pablo) – As the Spanish speaking love Adonis, this young man looked the part and created a lovable rogue, character. His accent was good and well maintained which complimented his adroitly delivered dialogue. He interacted effortlessly with the other two completing an inept villainous trio; who were entertaining funny and highly enjoyable.

Ryan Stevens – (Eddie) – For me this was the performance of the evening. He pitched the character perfectly, with an ideal mix of nervousness false bravado and genuine confidence. His dialogue was expertly delivered with outstanding dynamics. He brought out the fun and humour of the role famously and his overall execution was unequivocally brilliant. Visually he was vivid and energised with a warm all-encompassing smile, and his movement was easy and free. He has a great singing voice and “I could be that Guy” was superbly delivered giving us a glimpse of the true showman he is. His feelings for Deloris were clear for all to see and the audience related to this willing him to make a move!

Nicola Morrin – (Mother Superior) – This young lady looked every bit the serene dignified ladylike nun. Her movement was graceful yet determined and her deportment formidable and impressive. Characterisation was excellent composed poised and exasperated. Her dialogue was firm and fiery with great dynamics. She has a fine singing voice with impeccable diction. Having explored the lyrics she found and developed the humour much to the audiences delight. I particularly enjoyed “I Haven’t got a prayer”.

Daren Brandon – (Monsignor O’Hara) – What an enjoyable fun characterisation this was! I so liked the transition from the gentle tired and uninspired preacher into the confident animated groupie with energetic and vitalised movement and dialogue.

Charley Woodward – (Sister Mary Patrick) – I know I say this every time I see this young lady perform; and I have to reiterate my previous sentiments. She has the most amazing voice and it is a delight to hear her sing. Her characterisation was like a breath of fresh air larger than life and refreshingly naïve. She owned the role and commanded the stage on every entrance; Together with Sisters Mary Robert and Mary Lazarus they were hilariously funny and endeared themselves to the audience from the off.

Sally Rowlandson – (Sister Mary Robert) – This young lady had the diverse characteristics required to carry the role with great aplomb. Starting out as the shy mousy quiet postulant and transforming into a confident self-assured young lady. I would have liked a little more facial expression; however this did not detract from her overall character. Her singing had all the panache required for the numbers but she really came into her own with “The Life I Never Led” which was beautifully sung with passion and understanding.

Sarah Seabrook – (Sister Mary Lazarus) – As the crabby choir mistress this young lady was outstanding! Her rasping vocals and grumpy nature were perfection. It is something to maintain this during the dialogue but to carry it through in her numbers was something else

and I especially enjoyed her rap section in “Bless our Show”. Her movement complemented the character which created an overall first rate performance.

Sarah Abbott – (Sister Mary Martin-of-Tours) – This young lady was delightful as the slightly spaced out nun. Her random one liners were brilliant; “did the smoke appear for the election of a new pope”? Her timing was excellent and I really enjoyed the scene where she spoke Spanish to Pablo then knocked him to the floor.

Gloria Griffiths – (Sister Mary Theresa) – Although this was a minor character she played the role with all the experience of the seasoned pro she is. It was a simple yet effective character with much waving of the arms and running around.

Ensemble – This ensemble were super, they performed with an energetic enthusiasm bringing joy laughter and jubilation to the audience. “Spread the Love Around” was an absolute show stopper. Each nun and member of the general chorus had characters that they maintained throughout; complementing the scenes they were involved in. It was a shame that exits were impeded by the storage of the set in the wings; this unfortunately did cause some queuing when leaving the stage. However this did not detract from the overall performance. The quality of the singing was super with a good strong sound great harmonies and impeccable diction.

Jennifer Scott – (Director) – This was an expertly directed piece of theatre; she had worked on developing the characters so they were diverse and three dimensional. She brought out every ounce of humour and kept the pace moving throughout. Staging was first rate; one of my favourite scenes being the opening act 2 in the confessional, this had been well thought through was really funny and moved at a cracking pace. She had a clear vision of what she wanted to create and it worked tremendously well. Congratulations!

Neil Matthews – (Musical Director) – The hard work that this young man put into this production was clear for all to see. Principals were well drilled with great entries timing and diction. He ensured they understood the lyrics so they were able to put the numbers over in character. Voices in all numbers blended perfectly with super projection. He controlled the band with expertise and the balance between stage and pit was spot on.

Gemma Hough – (Choreographer) – I really liked the routines this young lady had devised; they were original contemporary and highly entertaining. Every member of the cast was able to perform the numbers extremely well within their own capability which means the difficulty was pitched just right. Most importantly she ensured they all had an absolute ball and this transpired to the audience who couldn't help but smile. All the numbers were good but “Spread the Love Around” was a standout; exciting energetic and full of zing punch and enthusiasm.

David Parsonson – (Production Manager) – The organisation involved in pulling a show together is a daunting task for anyone. However; once again David proved his worth with his adept skill at bringing all elements of a production together. There was nothing that could be faulted

Carol Hodgkinson – (Stage Manager) – This was an extremely difficult stage to run; with a massive cumbersome set which must have taken up a lot of storage space in the wings. That said the SM with **Chris Dinsey/James Cook** – (ASM's & Crew) – did an amazing job manoeuvring the scenery and keeping the action moving. My congratulations to you and your crew!

Kim Hollamby – (Lighting Design) – I have come to expect consistency from this talented designer and I was not disappointed with his plot for this production. He flooded the stage with ambient colour which enhanced the action fully. There was also an excellent use of fixed spots which really helped to focus the smaller action scenes.

Adrian Croton – (Lighting Technician) – The cue board was expertly controlled ensuring everything happened as and when it should. There was a good use of follow spots well operated by **Louis Martin/Mike Boswell**

Scenic Projects – (Scenery/Properties) – The set was super; fresh well painted and looked fabulous. The props that came with the set complemented the scenery and worked extremely well, it was just a shame it was so big!

Yvonne Maynard – (Wardrobe Mistress) – Yvonne had done a super job of collating the costumes; which were supplied by **Costume Workshop**. She made sure all the nuns habits were correctly donned which can be something of a trial where wimples are concerned. I liked the four girls' costumes and the boys' suits. Eddie's uniform looked authentic and Deloris' leopard print costume was fabulous.

Pam Dennis – (Hairdresser) – Pam had ensured that any hair that could be seen was nicely tailored to the period finishing off the costumes perfectly.

Dylan Dambella – (Make-up) - I was impressed with the application of the make-up. Although the nuns' make-up was heavy enough to ensure their faces did not disappear under the lights it was simple and natural looking. Deloris' make-up was excellent adding depth to her skin colour.

Stacey Stockwell – (Signing) – Although I was transfixed with the action on the stage I couldn't help but take several sneaky peeks at this young lady. She is an absolute joy to watch acting out every word of dialogue and every lyric to each song with such enthusiasm and animation. How does she learn it all?

Programme – I liked this programme design it certainly made a statement bold and evangelical. **Yvonne Maynard/Andrew Higgs** had once again produced an informative well laid out programme, combining society and other local group production news. I thought **Brian Burden's** colour photos on this occasion were superb.

I would like to say a special thank you to Barrie for looking after me so well, whilst also running front of house.

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13