

Directed and Choreographed by Ray Jeffery

Musical Direction by Bryan Cass

Performed at the Civic Theatre Chelmsford on Wednesday 28th September 2016

There was a traditional circus feel to the scenery on display as we entered the auditorium, with a Pierrot clown and rather stern looking lady (who we later learn is Charity Barnum) sat in balconies at either side. All in all, the scenery worked for the show but there were a few teething issues with the scenery that was added throughout the production: trucks not passing through the space, signs getting erected too early etc,

The opening featured most of the ensemble in lycra cat suits, which didn't leave much to the imagination. I was grateful that as the show progressed, items were added to those costumes! Otherwise the show had some lovely costumes, and a particularly fabulous quick change by Claire Carr followed by the line 'I didn't have time to change my petticoat...', well I'm not surprised, she barely had time to change at all – well done dressing team! Some lovely costume choices, particularly in black and white which looked stunning.

The relationship between Chairy and Barnum was played well by Claire Carr and Simon Bristoe. We could really see the frustrations that Charity felt, her exasperation and then the hurt she felt about Jenny Lind. Claire really portrayed this role expertly, and there were some touching moments between the two, particularly at the end on the steps of City Hall singing *The Colours of My Life* (reprise). Simon Bristoe gave a brilliant performance as PT Barnum, capturing his energy and spirit right from the start. Despite his injury he carried on, and although he couldn't perform the circus tricks, it didn't detract from his performance. Well done to both of you for your performances.

Jenny Lind was played by Rachel Summers and what a lovely voice. She sang with ease, capturing the demanding nature of the Swedish Songbird. Barry Hester kept the story moving in his role as Ringmaster; he had a good presence and energy on the stage. Tom Thumb (Oli Budino) was full of energy in his song *Bigger Isn't Better*, and took command of the stage. There were some suspicious American accents from some of the other supporting roles, but generally these parts were restricted to a few short lines so it didn't have too big an impact. Brad Wendes, the white faced clown stole some of the show with his circus skills, particularly walking the tight rope on behalf of Barnum, which he did so confidently and with ease.

I was slightly disappointed by the lack of a big show dance number, there was the opportunity but instead the ensemble did some movement and lots of poses which I feel was a shame. The last big number did go on a little too long, I realise that everyone got their moment to show off their talent, but nothing was spectacular enough for that length.

Sound was generally good but the ensemble only numbers were a little quiet, perhaps contrasting with the rest of the mic'd principals, and a few first lines were missed here and there. Lighting was good and fitted with the colourful nature of the show. The band sounded great throughout, led by MD Bryan Cass; a lovely sound.

Overall a great show, led by the strength of the two leads, but with some fantastic numbers. Particular highlights for me were *The Museum Song*, and *One Brick at a Time*. Well done to all the team who were part of this production.

Reviewed by Alexandra Berriman
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