

My Fair Lady - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (1st March 2019) Review by Cheryl Rogers

Most fans of musical theatre love 'My Fair Lady' and the full house at the Civic Theatre on Friday night was testament to this fact. It proves that you don't need a brand new show to pull in the audience and people still love what they know, in this case the wonderful songs of Lerner and Loewe, 'Wouldn't it be Lovely', 'With a Little Bit of Luck', 'I Could Have Danced All Night', 'On The Street Where You Live', they just kept coming. This was a good amateur production with a hardworking, enthusiastic cast who played as a tight team, bringing a polished production to the stage.

The night really belongs to Professor Henry Higgins despite the title of the show and this was an ambitious part for John Sullivan with lengthy dialogue, tongue twisting lyrics and difficult characterisation. When following in the footsteps of Rex Harrison, who is known for the definitive portrayal of this role, the task is even more onerous, so John is to be congratulated for his impressive self-confidence and grasp of this character and the ability to make it his own. I enjoyed his performance.

Joanne Quinney playing Eliza Doolittle, gave us a louder, deeper voiced and more robust interpretation than perhaps we're used to and one that I struggled to enjoy at first but she certainly grated on the ear, as was intended, and there is no doubt that she can sing. As the story unfolded, her character and voice changed and we saw a softer more vulnerable Eliza. She did this transition beautifully and I particularly liked her rendition of 'Without You'.

Another major role in this show is that of Alfred P Doolittle, brought to life by the irrepressible Barry Hester. Barry was certainly meant to play Alfred Doolittle, a role tailor made for him as he does comedy and exuberance so well and plays a great drunk. He was the one on stage who appeared the most natural, bringing the stage and cast to life every time he made an appearance, especially in 'Get Me to the Church on Time.' He was just as believable revealing a nastier streak in his final scene. Great fun.

Kevin Abrey as Colonel Pickering was excellent with just the right touch of gentleness and humour, an ideal foil for Higgins. He is always a pleasure to watch. Lynette Sullivan played Mrs Higgins, looking and sounding every inch the exasperated mother of Henry Higgins, she was the perfect upper class matriarch. Other parts were obviously enjoyed by the cast members who played them and then of course there was the chorus. Revelling in the cockney knees ups and elegant in the ball and Ascot scenes, as always they were a true asset to this production and to this company.

I enjoyed seeing this show again and being reminded of what a great musical it is. It stands the test of time and can still give newer shows a run for their money. Please continue to mix the old with the new CAODS, coming to see you perform lifts the spirit.