

Evita - performed by CAODS

Friday 27th September 2019

Directed by Sallie Warrington

Musical Director - James Harragan

The packed auditorium was greeted to a very ornate professional set offering a selection of levels to be used throughout the evening. The actors sat facing the theatre-goers, immersed in a film as the flickering lights in the darkness highlighted their faces. Costumes were suitable homely for the financially struggling Argentinian public. The announcement of the death of Eva Peron triggered a heartfelt lament as society mourned for her premature passing, representing the grief of a nation. The uniformed soldiers sombrely bringing on an open coffin made the image all the more raw.

*'Oh What a Circus'* introduced us to a confident Che the revolutionist who narrated us through Eva's life, played by the very competent David Everest-Ring. He proved to be a very strong vocal leader throughout, every line well dictated, his movement about the stage demanding attention. He had a reassuring constancy. I did find the early vocals with the chorus slightly pitchy in the earlier company numbers, but this evened out as the performance developed.

Eva, played by Sammy-Jo Evans, again was slightly sharp in her opening number *'Buenos Aires'* but my overall memory of this song was the very accurately executed choreography, which transformed the stage from grief into energy, a real treat. It was ambitious and creative. Sammy-Jo embodied the spirit of Eva; she was confident, sparky, and fiercely ambitious, almost ruthless with her tenacity to fight the oppression carried with her from her poverty-stricken beginnings.

*'On this Night a Thousand Stars'* introduced Magaldi, framed by starlight on the balcony and bathed in light, played by Michael Bardo. With full character and guitar playing perfection, almost a caricature of every tango player before and after him, and perfect moustache, slick hair and beautiful singing voice, no wonder Eva fell for him.

For a while I did lose some diction on *'Goodnight and Thank You'*, with the swift queue of men at Eva's door, but not a step of pace was lost as the Colonels filed onto stage to perform *'The Art of the Impossible'*. This was a surreal sequence, with the Colonels slightly encumbered by their period accurate and bulky uniform, but then again, they were not designed to sing and dance in. Together, they appeared intimidating and cold, but all well in tune with each other in tone and movement.

Eva's new love interest with an eye more on her own advantage than her love was Peron, played perfectly awkwardly by John Sullivan. He was overwhelmed by this glamorous, young 'Lady Macbeth' type character, who held power over the political future of Argentina, guided by the will and determination.

Her eviction of Peron's previous mistress, played superbly by Natasha Lesley truly showed her ruthlessness, as she unceremoniously dumped her belongings from the balcony to scatter at the feet of the wounded woman. Natasha's heart-breaking song '*Another Suitcase in Another Hall*' was well pitched, caught in a blue hued spotlight, supported by a chorus of male accompaniments.

'*A new Argentina*' closed the first Act, with the lighting casting lucid shadows on the crowd below, with Che clearly aware of the misguided leader who has gained the trust of the public with Eva's close advice, but not earned it. The slow motion made the sequence almost haunting and grotesque, with a foreboding atmosphere of the tragedy the events will eventually lead to.

The song '*Don't Cry for Me Argentina*' gave way to a worship of Eva, who appeared almost like a spiritual entity, gathering more and more followers on her quest for power and acceptance, with a perfect atmospheric build-up and ultimate crescendo.

The number '*Rainbow High*' was technically very difficult, but pulled off with ease and confidence with the maids and butlers ensuring Eva was dressed and adorned with jewellery in time for the Rainbow Tour. Her physical descent from her pedestal was well evidenced in her well performed crumbling of energy and false smiles as she struggled with her pain and the pace she had set herself.

The solo of the young girl performed by Anna Edmundson was performed with such composure and control, you could have heard a pin drop as she looked into the eyes of her idol and asked for guidance.

The final songs with Eva's last curtain slowly closing were really heart-wrenching, sung with beauty and soul, and supported by her ever-loving husband, who looked so lost with no way to help her as the nurses guided her to her deathbed. The flashback ghosts of her past were very moving and clever, and Eva's final lament as an apparition on the balcony with a perfect beam of light highlighting her which I'm sure drew a few tears from the audience.

The orchestra led by musical director James Harragan enhanced the show and provided an exemplary performance. Sallie Warrington, the director, has carefully planned out this show, with such attention to detail and remained very sensitive to tell Eva's story. Choreography was sharp, the chorus very well led and strong in vocals and performance, the military were intimidating, and the lighting and sound were well executed. Wigs by Patsy

Page were outstanding as usual. Just how many she had to dress was incredible for this production, indeed I think I counted at least seven for Eva alone!. Costumes were correct for the period and again a huge undertaking for Wardrobe Mistress Lynette Sullivan. Rehearsal time was put to very good use to produce this tragic and politically important story, which still affects the lives of many today.

We would like to thank Gill Plumtree for looking after us so well during the evening and send congratulations to all the cast and crew.

Katherine Tokley