

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2016-17

BATS

“Little Shop of Horrors” directed by Pippa Revell
Adjudicated by Andrew Hodgson and Kate Sheffield
16/02/17

INTRODUCTION

“Little Shop of Horrors” is a popular musical based on the classic Roger Corman movie of 1959. The score, by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, reflects the music of this period. Although the show is high on “feel good” factor, it also has an underlying serious point to make about how capitalism corrupts, and the ending is quite downbeat. In the film version of the musical, the ending was altered in response to audience reaction! The show was a perfect vehicle for BATS, who have gained an excellent reputation in the field of local musical theatre.

FOH/PUBLICITY

We received a warm welcome from the friendly and efficient Front of House team. We were also greeted by members of the cast dressed as their “Skid Row” characters! We were given good seats, and there was a tempting array of interval refreshments! The programme design was excellent; colourful, glossy, and informative. The house was full and the audience buzzed with pre-show anticipation, helped by well chosen musical tracks to put us in the appropriate mood.

SET DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION/DRESSING incl props.

The set design and construction was excellent. Imaginative use was made of the stage area, with the Florist shop as the main setting, complete with counter, window etc. The sliding walls of Skid Row that fronted it were an ingenious idea, the main entrance door into the shop was incorporated into them. The scenic art was detailed, and the set was very well dressed; the transformation of the shop, as the money came rolling in, was impressively achieved and a great job was done in the accumulation of the many props needed for the production. Attention to detail was obvious and the stage management team did a very efficient job. The use of cardboard covered rostra at the front of the stage, served to incorporate the band firmly into the action. Very well done to everyone involved in this aspect of the production!

The presentation of Audrey 2 was outstanding. The puppets, at different stages of growth, were beautifully made, culminating in the massive Audrey 2 that filled the stage most impressively. There were tentacles that hung down, at one point entwining themselves around Audrey, and an enormous mouth, ready to swallow its victims, surrounded by a set of shark-sharp teeth! Geoff Hewitson, who operated Audrey 2, did a wonderful job, as did David Chilton, his booming voice and impressive singing could not have been bettered! A superb achievement by all involved!

COSTUMES

An excellent selection of costumes had been assembled, very much in-period, with hairstyles and make-up to match. The whole wardrobe had been colour coordinated and it was clear that a lot of thought and planning had gone into how each character should look, in terms of the story, and the early 1960's vibe of the show. Very well done!

LIGHTING/SOUND

The lighting design enhanced the action of the story, and good attention was paid to the use of colour, and spot lighting, to highlight performances. There was some shadow at the front of the stage that created a "dead" area, but this did not detract from the overall effectiveness of the lighting. Both lighting and sound cues were smoothly executed, and sound effects were excellent. We did wonder if the use of radio mics was necessary in a venue of this size, and (generally) we thought that the amplification of music and dialogue was too loud, resulting in the distortion of lyrics and dialogue on occasions.

MUSIC/CHOREOGRAPHY

Musical Director John Hoskyns did a great job, along with his fellow musicians, Felix and Russ, to produce a fast paced, and professional sounding accompaniment for the show, that really drove the action along. It was clear that the cast had been very well rehearsed; there were some impressive harmonies and everyone looked and sounded very confident. Equally, the lively choreography by Emma Tedder was attuned to the talents of the company, who, again, looked confident with what they had to do. Movement around the stage was good, and there were some attractive groupings. Maximum use made of the performance areas, including the auditorium.

PRODUCTION

Pippa Revell and her team presented us with a lively, fast-paced and very colourful production that never stopped for breath. The show looked as though it had been very well rehearsed, and the cast seemed confident in what they were doing. The style of the production was clearly established from the beginning and was carried through to the end. Blocking was good, and the use of the "down and outs" to assist with the smooth scene changes was a great idea. However, we would have liked more light and shade in the action at times, and in the presentation of the libretto. Everything was very "full on", and the combination of accents (although mostly well-achieved) and the loud amplification meant that some of the dialogue lacked clarity. This said, the high standard of production values, and performance, resulted in a show that more than held its own against some of the bigger musical societies in the area!

PERFORMANCES

There was excellent ensemble work from the whole company, whose enthusiasm, energy and enjoyment was key to the success of the production.

SEYMOUR

Ryan Maslen was perfectly cast in this leading role. He looked and sounded just right; the geeky personality he presented to the audience really won their (and Audrey's) hearts! Ryan moved very well and sang most impressively, showing a wide range in his vocal work. Although he occasionally gabbled some of his dialogue, Ryan's comic timing, combined with a good accent, contributed towards his successful and enjoyable performance! Very well done!

AUDREY

Rebecca Hoskyns is a talented and charismatic young performer. She has a lovely singing voice, moves well and demonstrated depth in her acting; Audrey's final moments were very touchingly portrayed. Rebecca had the comic skills this part demands, and the studied set of arm movements she used made her character seem like a living doll; an interesting concept! A delightful performance, very well done!

MUSHNIK

The ever-reliable Rob Warne caught the appropriate accent and mannerisms demanded by this doomed character very well. His fatherly relationship with Seymour was sympathetically conveyed, a nice piece of pair playing here from Rob and Ryan. Their duet, "Mushnik and Son" gave us the opportunity to hear Rob's confident and pleasing singing voice. We were genuinely sorry when Mushnik was despatched so suddenly! Well done!

ORIN

This is a gift of a role, quite short but full of impact! Ryan Lenney, looking like a cross between Danny Zuko and James Dean, certainly played it for all it was worth, and was suitably slick and "full-on" in the part. Ryan had a strong singing voice, and a very expressive face, but we would also have liked his characterisation to convey more underlying menace towards Audrey and Seymour. Ryan's performance in the cameo role of Martin, made for a nice contrast and showed his versatility!

CRYSTAL, RON and CHIFFON

Played by Nancy Dines, Lesley Mercer and Lea Friend, this lively vocal trio were the main backing singers in the show; they looked and sounded just like the popular girl groups of the early 1960's! The ladies performed with animation and vocal confidence, adding so much to the fun and authenticity of the production. They also looked fab, with their "Beehive" hairdos and matching outfits, the midnight blue evening gowns were stunning! Well done!

CRYSTALETTE, RONETTE and CHIFFONETTE

We saw the A team at the performance we attended. Faith Arnold, Sophie Mercer and Grace Bach were the younger counterparts of the previously mentioned ladies, and complimented them very well, representing the early 60's teenager perfectly in their

appearance and manner! They performed with confidence and charm, making another lively contribution to the show!

THE WINOS

As this unsavoury looking trio, Geoff Hewitson, Fiona Morris and Caz Chapman, were present in the auditorium before the show began, and then onstage throughout (although Geoff went off to operate Audrey 2). Not only did their presence establish that we were in “Skid Row” in the Ensemble numbers but they also played an integral part in the smooth operation of the scene changes. They remained in character throughout and looked as though they were having a great time!

OTHER SMALL ROLES were played by Kelsey Phillips, Arjan Van Heuvelyn, Jaquie Lewis and Mark Hinson. Each performer made their own mark on the production in their nicely observed cameo performances and they were part of the strong ensemble work in the show. This also applied to the three children we saw at this performance; Victoria Walton, Connie Lewis and Violet Keys. Well done everyone!

SUMMATION

This was a fast-paced, colourful, tightly directed and performed production of this very popular musical, with strong musical values. The audience loved it! Thank you BATS for such an entertaining and enjoyable piece of musical theatre!

Best wishes

Andrew Hodgson (Adjudicator)