

Made in Dagenham – WAOS, Witham Public Hall

Guest Reviewer - Christine Adams-Davidson

I had the pleasure of going to see “Made in Dagenham” on its second night - what a show. The audience were packed to the rafters and the standing ovation at the end was so well deserved. Everyone involved with this energy packed production must feel so proud of what they have achieved during lockdown restrictions. As a director who also had to rehearse through that time, I know just how hard it was, so plaudits go to all the cast and especially to Nikki Mundell-Poole, the director who through it all, put together this pulsating production.

“Made in Dagenham” the musical, is based on the real-life 1968 sewing machinist strike at the Ford factory in Dagenham, it was influential in the passing of the Equal Pay Act of 1970. The strike probably had a direct effect on the lives of many in the audience and the cast alike. The production reflects a time before Women’s Lib, when the differences in pay, between men and women, were much more than now. The feel of the show made it obvious that a lot of background work was involved to get the costumes, wigs and the set right to bring you into the late nineteen sixties.

Before I mention the cast, I must mention the backstage team who are often forgotten in a review; they have to be commended for their organisation in moving flats and furniture seamlessly whilst the musical played on. Not once did I feel that they were in the way and it made the show flow right from the beginning.

Amy Pryce was performing in her first lead role as Rita O’Grady. She was excellent as the feisty mum and worker who took up the fight for equality for women. Her characterisation was very believable and her vocals were spot on. I loved the moving final number Stand Up. Kris Tyler as her bewildered husband Eddie showed emotion during his song ‘I’m sorry I love you’ and was a competent foil with a good acting performance.

Justine Ephgrave as Connie, the shop steward, acted with conviction and her solo number ‘Same old Story’ was sung with passion and conviction. Sammy-Jo Evans, who I last saw as Evita with CAODS, played a totally opposite character this time, as the woolly, word forgetting, loveable Clare. Her voice at the end of act 1 blew me away.

The choice of casting Rhianna Howard as Beryl was truly a great move by Nikki the director. Strong on delivery, with good comic timing and a great character to play on stage, this lady has true stage presence and was absolutely fab. Megan Abbott (Cass) & Emily Smith (Sandra) formed the main support of the Ford girls, working with Rita, they portrayed their roles well.

To complete the ladies roles we had Corrina Wilson as Barbara Castle and Susy Hawkes-Dighton as Lisa Hopkins, the wife of Ford’s Managing Director, who befriends Rita. Both

gave solid performances and their characterisation was great. Corrina as Barbara maintained her accent throughout and her song 'Ideal World' got a huge round of applause from the audience.

Now for the men of this huge cast of 36. Michael Mundell-Poole as the union rep and Stewart Adkins as Jeremy Hopkins gave clear, confident and professional characters and should be commended.

David Slater as the bumbling, pipe smoking, Harold Wilson again mastered the accent required and with a twinkle in his eye, seemed to be having a lot of fun on stage and his dancing was a delight. His song 'Always a Problem', with his aides was very humorous. Edward Groombridge as the American Tooley with 'This is America' was also very good and again the accent was kept throughout.

The two children we saw that night, Avalon Lawton and Shay Mullery were very sweet and showed confidence for such young actors on the stage.

In such a large musical you absolutely need a great ensemble and Nikki definitely found a really strong one with great singing and movement with all harmonies blending well. This is a long show but the energies of the whole group never flagged from beginning to end, I think as an audience we all felt quite emotional at the end during the 'Stand Up' finale. Indeed most did stand up and at the finale, the standing ovation was fantastic.

Musical Director, James Tovey and his orchestra of five melded well with the singers and didn't overpower them. Costumes, hair and makeup were spot on and the simple set was very clever. Lighting was mostly ok although I found that occasionally some of the actors were sometimes in the dark, stage left but this didn't detract from the overall show.

When you know a show is being directed by Nikki, you know you are onto a winner. Her flair and panache is obvious and this lady knows just how to put on an excellent show. I urge you all to get a ticket for the rest of the run. Congratulations to all.