

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2022-2023

WAOS

Young Frankenstein

Directed by Nikki Mundell-Poole,

Adjudicated by Amanda Powell, assisted by Becky Clemens

28/04/2023

FRONT OF HOUSE

The FOH team are always so friendly, kind, and welcoming. The programme looked very slick with plenty of interesting information to peruse. I especially liked the montage of photos that showed just how much fun the cast had had during rehearsals.

I must just mention a team that often gets overlooked – the publicity team. Before coming along to adjudicate I was extremely impressed with the amount and quality of the social media publicity. As the theatre was full when I attended I am assuming your hard work paid off.

SETTING/STAGE MANAGEMENT/ VIDEO SCREEN

I am always impressed with just how much amateur groups can manage to achieve on smaller stages and/or smaller budgets and I was pleased to find the staging for Young Frankenstein didn't disappoint. There was only one minor thing I would have liked to have seen (although I appreciate this may not have been possible due to small wing space etc.) and that was to have a wall on both sides of the video screen, just to make it aesthetically pleasing. I loved the revolving bookcase/wall, and the haycart (with the hilarious horses), they both worked so well and looked extremely effective, although I wish the wall had been a little higher so that the 'bed scene' with Inga and Frankenstein was a little more concealed. I could see the actors just lying there waiting to drop the next item of clothing and feel that a slightly higher wall would have hidden them a little more and made the clothes dropping much more effective. The lab equipment with all the lit-up gauges/handles etc. were brilliant and so effective! For the most part transitions and scene changes were slick, but perhaps you might consider turning the video screen to black during the scene changes? Also, there were a few times when the re-adjusting of trucks (predominantly the haycart) was slightly distracting. There was a scene change in the second act that slowed the pace, just before all the villagers enter the stage. I feel this could have been prevented simply by having the villagers enter to the front of the stage, which would have disguised the truck being wheeled off and therefore kept the pace up.

The use of the video screen was so effective, you felt that you were in each room. It was especially effective in the horse ride scene, fireside room, and monster shadow section of 'Putting on the Ritz'. I loved the pyrotechnics, they were fantastic!

This is just a personal observation, but I did feel the section where the monster is created finished with a bit of a fizzle rather than a bang! It meant that the anticipation afterwards didn't feel tense enough. You had used the video screen so well up to this point that it seemed a shame you didn't move Frankenstein to the side and utilise the screen by having an almighty bolt of lightning that, from the audience would have looked like it was going straight into the monster's body.

LIGHTING AND SOUND

A well-lit stage with nice mood lighting, flashing light effects and a good use of colours to add atmosphere to each scene. I did however find there were moments when using the mood lighting that the cast didn't quite 'find their light' which left them in shadow, so perhaps either marking the stage or a few more practises with the cast when using heavy mood lighting may help them in future productions.

Sound was well controlled, although it would have been nice to have had the thunder claps a little louder at the very beginning, to create a slightly scarier atmosphere.

The mics seemed to differ in level, leaving some actors very quiet and some very loud. I am aware this is not always a mic/sound issue and can sometimes be an actor not projecting enough for the mic to pick them up, but either way, I found it did improve as the show progressed.

MUSIC

The band were an absolute pleasure to listen to from beginning to end. There were one or two moments where actors had finished their lines and seemed to have to wait for the music to start, rather than the music/song intro coming in a few lines beforehand, but this was only minor.

COSTUME / MAKE-UP / WIGS / PROPS

I absolutely loved all the costumes and commend the costume & wardrobe team for choosing/obtaining them! The villager's outfits were wonderfully bright and cheerful, a nice juxtaposition against the dark and eeriness of the castle staff (Igor and Frau...don't want to say her name in case I set the horses off again!). I would however avoid using costumes that are the same colour as your backdrop (Putting on The Ritz), as actors tend to blend in with the background. If there were any quick changes, they were seamless as I didn't notice any! I must commend the make-up and wig teams also, as the monster's make-up was really very good, and the wigs looked nice. I have a hatred of cheap wigs looking fake and shiny under the stage lights, so was pleased not to see this, although I was a little unsure about Elizabeth Benning's 'distressed' wig in the second act as it didn't seem to match the hair colour of her wig in act one.

Props were great, all the candles were especially effective, but I do wonder about the use of props in visual gags (like those used in the scene with the Hermit whether they should have been larger, as I felt some of the humour was missed, possibly because some audience members couldn't see the props clearly).

CHOREOGRAPHY / DIRECTION

Nikki's choreography contained a lot of variety and was mostly within the capabilities of all those performing. The group numbers were bright and entertaining, and the barbershop quartet moment was so good.

I thoroughly enjoyed the 'Tits' and 'Hayride' numbers, yours and Mel Brooks' saucy personalities shone through in these numbers and the audience loved them!

I also loved the subtle little choreographical touches you added, like the armography in the tits section of 'Please Don't Touch Me', hilarious! And the moment Inga lays down on the lab bench and rests her head in Frankenstein's book, gorgeous!

Nikki has a great knack of getting a cast to perform with gusto and this is especially important in a Mel Brooks show. The idea is to ramp up the acting until it's almost too much, as Mel loved a lot of visual as well as vocal humour, and although everyone was incredibly good, I felt that some could have afforded to ramp it up just another notch or two, thereby giving a clear and strong difference between the 'straight man' characters like Frankenstein

and the 'deadpan' playing of Frau Blucher (cue horses). This will also help with the pacing and comic timing of a show.

The staging for the principal scenes were strong throughout, and you could see by the obvious enjoyment of the cast that Nikki is a respected director who the cast have a strong rapport with.

PERFORMANCES

KRIS TYLER (Fredrick Frankenstein): A tough role to play, as the 'straight man' is generally responsible for keeping the storyline going, giving the other actors the chance to play the gags! Kris did this very well, and with so much stage time he showed he had good stamina! Good singing voice, just watch your diction when speaking as it took a while for me to understand what you were saying (unfortunately you had a mic that was very low).

MICHAEL MUNDELL-POOLE (Igor): A very physical part that Michael handled well. You definitely gave me elements of Marty Feldman. I enjoyed your duet with Frankenstein, it was a nice comical partnership throughout. Also liked the leg dragging gags etc. they were very good. I was pleased to see you stay in character throughout giving us many funny facial expressions.

AMY PRICE (Inga): This is such a great role to get your teeth into and Amy achieved this. Mel always loves to put a beautiful female comedy role into his shows, where visual and vocal comic timing is essential, and Amy achieved all of these elements. A very good paring with Frankenstein and I was extremely impressed with how strong her singing vocals were during all the gymnastics of the 'Hayride' number! A strong all-round performer with a lovely singing voice, excellent yodelling skills and great facial expressions.

WILLIAM HACKETT (The Monster): An excellent portrayal of The Monster, a role that's not as easy to accomplish as you think. When you add in prosthetics/masks, the character work must become so much bigger, as you are unable to use your face as much, and when all you are left with are grunts to portray your character it gets even harder. I was pleased to see the prosthetics didn't hinder Will's performance at all and he gave us a great range of physicality throughout. I absolutely loved your rendition of 'Putting on the Ritz', your tender moment with Elizabeth Benning and then that beautiful voice came out! You also established your change in character quickly and with great effect at the end. Excellent job!

MAEVE BORGES (Frau Blucher): A beautifully unnerving interpretation of the late Frankenstein's girlfriend. Playing 'deadpan' is nowhere near as easy as it looks and making sure the pace doesn't drop when doing this can be quite difficult. I really liked your 'Boyfriend' number and the almost bored expression mixed with slight contempt you kept up throughout.

RICHARD MCNEILL (Inspector Kemp): A confident performer with a clear speaking voice and good character work. It really made me laugh when he twisted his 'fake arm' about! I do hope the show fees for this production didn't cost you an arm and a leg?!

CORRINA GROOMBRIDGE (Elizabeth Benning): A lovely characterization of the 'bright young thing' Elizabeth Benning, Frankenstein's fiancée. This is a performer who immediately commands the stage, uses great visual comedy, performs with gusto and lifts the pace! I was missing a bit of vocal light and shade from Corrina as well as the American

accent at times, but loved all the impressive little vocal licks and tricks she used when singing. Corrina is definitely in her element when she gets into her show-stopping operatic range!

KEITH HARMAN (The Hermit): I enjoyed the little interlude between the Hermit and the Monster, although (as previously mentioned) I didn't quite feel you both pulled off the visual comedy at points. But I have to say what a delightful singing voice Keith has, with such a nice vocal tone. Keith conveyed his song with aplomb and gave a charming portrayal of this lonely man.

DANCERS/TAPPERS/ENSEMBLE: Very nice dancing throughout with lovely facial expressions. I always enjoy a tap number, so was pleased to see you all giving it a go with great enthusiasm!

I enjoyed all the ensemble scenes and commend you all for wonderfully strong vocals throughout, it was just a shame the script didn't allow for more changes to shine. I especially enjoyed the barbershop quartet and 'Transylvania Mania'. Well done to the entire ensemble.

OVERALL PRODUCTION

A highly entertaining production. Everyone portrayed their characters well. The set was effective and cleverly done. Lighting was very good, and the mic and sound levels were eventually correct. The transitions from scene to scene were mostly smooth. The staging and choreography were of a good standard and the dancing was enjoyable. There were lots of elements I greatly enjoyed with many 'laugh out loud' moments. The band was wonderful and there were some very strong performances. I feel the pace and comic timing was lacking on a few occasions, but I found this production to be full of fun and you certainly all looked like you were having a great time!

It was a pleasure to watch you all. Well done WAOS!

Best wishes

Amanda Powell (Adjudicator)