

Adjudication

North Essex Theatre Guild - Full Length Festival 2011 - 12
Group: Witham Amateur Operatic Society
Venue: Witham Public Hall
Date of Adj: Saturday 29th October 2011
Production: GODSPELL music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz
Director: Angela Briley
Director's assistant Bailey Whitnell
Musical Director Dan Ribbits
Adjudicators Kerry King and Dawn King

Introduction

A warm friendly greeting and atmosphere always welcomes us at Witham Operatic so our thanks to the front of house manager Patsy and personnel for making us feel so welcome. A well designed and informative programme made good reading and ensured that the audience had a good idea of what the show entailed. Having colour photographs was extremely useful in being able to put names to faces! Godspell is actually having a Broadway revival at the moment so how lucky were the local residents that they did not have to travel that far to see a good show!

Set

The set consisted of scaffolding construction which helped to form raised platforms, steps, a platform 'trolley' and platforms at the back for the musicians which meant that they were fully integrated into the performing space. The large advertising board at the front could have been removed just prior to curtain up as by then everyone had seen it and it was a slight distraction during the performance. I liked the concept of using various levels and minimal staging so that everything could flow without set changes. The wheeled platform was used creatively and was therefore very effective.

Props Manager Janice Hawkes

Props were very well organized, ready to hand and appropriate for the period and style of this piece. The cast worked well in how they supported each other whilst handling their props quietly and efficiently.

Sound Paul Galley

Timing, sound levels and balance for all sounds effects (such as thunder and morning programme music for example) were excellent.

Lighting Nigel Northfield

The blue lighting on the side legs pre-curtain up were effective and suited the set concept very well. The six lamps at the back helped to create various different moods with different coloured gels and/or gentle chasing at various points in the show.

Projections were not only effective but also good quality. Red general lighting with a spot on the actor added to the mood of the song and the follow spot when used was very proficient. Some good effects to create the right ambience such as a spot on the vocal solo and dimmed lighting on the chorus. The blue lighting, smoke and the spot on Jesus at the crucifixion ensured a dramatic climax to end the show.

Wardrobe Mistresses Sara Lyndon and Debbie Stirling

and **Make-up** Marea Irving and Sophie Brown

The costumes were generally good and reflected the period in a minimalist way. They helped to create symbolic and stereotypical characters and also added colour which was an important part of the action. It was a fun touch having Jesus in a Superman T-shirt, braces and red trousers.

Make-up was well suited to the characters. It was not over-done yet strong enough not to disappear under lighting.

Choreographer Natalie Wilson

The choreography was simple yet effective. Cleverly different in each of the numbers and adjusted to suit the capabilities of each individual. At times movements were spontaneous which gave a natural and fun feel.

Cast

Tim Clarke: Jesus

Tim was captivating and illustrated his versatility throughout his performance. The various facets of this character were portrayed well. Tim's excellent narration and story-telling together with his effortless interactions with other characters, kept the pace and energy flowing. Tim dominated the stage, weaving stories into one another effortlessly and impressing us even more with the vocal numbers. He was strong vocally with consistent good movement and confident use of the set with good stage presence. His dexterity in handling the magic and strong emotional range made this portrayal of Jesus into a believable character.

Michael Stewart: Judas and John the Baptist

Michael was always focused and ensured that vocal numbers, dialogue and action were full of energy. He moved with ease and worked well with other characters in a believable way and was both a likeable John and Judas (and played the betrayal very well). Michael's duet with Tim was very enjoyable.

Matt Waldie

Matt's expressive facial expressions and good sense of timing made good viewing. He made a convincing interviewer and adapted well to the different characterizations required of him.

Christina Coe

Christina had a commanding presence on stage, was obviously confident in all she did, interacted well with others and moved very well. Her duet with Sarah was a pleasure to listen to.

Patrick O'Brien

Patrick has a powerful, rich voice not only also how he spoke but how he sang. His cameo depiction of the devil was good fun and he made a strong presence in the opening number.

Richard Herring

Richard was always consistent in his singing and how he interacted with others and ensured that all the characters he played had something different about them which is not always an easy thing to do.

Sarah Grant

Sarah was always smiling and engaged with the action and focused consistently in what she was doing.

Sarah Waldie

Sarah was a good dancer who looked vivacious and added energy to choreography and chorus numbers.

Sophie Morton

Sophie warmed up once her confidence grew and she relaxed. She was always focused on what was happening and made sure that dialogue was well projected and characterizations well portrayed.

Marcin Raczek

Marcin brought a lot of energy to the stage and was always interacting with the other actors with good expressions and smiles and therefore made an active and positive contribution to the chorus numbers.

Trevor Drury

Trevor gave good portrayals of the characters he played and we enjoyed his part in 'We Beseech Thee'. His facial expressions, chorus work and movement on stage were consistently good.

Kath Adkins

Kath is an experienced performer who exudes energy, talent and stage presence. Her dancing and vocal numbers were all of a high standard and we particularly liked 'Turn back oh man'. She made difficult songs sound easy. Kath not only looked good but gave a strong, enjoyable performance.

Rachel Clapp

Rachel also gave strong portrayals of characters and obvious stage presence... She was good to listen including dialogue with good intonation and meaning. Her vocal numbers were good with strong body language and interaction with others which reflected her obvious stage presence. We both liked the very good rendition of 'Bless the Lord'

George Jordan

George was another gentleman with a powerful voice and 'All Good Gifts' was a delight to listen to. He ensured he was a strong member of the chorus and adapted well to various characterisations.

The Band: Dan Ribbits, Darrel Drake, Belinda Barnes and Tim Shelley

The musicians were obviously a very talented group led by the excellent MD Dan Ribbits. Each of the band members without exception made an excellent contribution to this show. The music was never obtrusive and complemented the vocal style of each actor.

Both guitars which accompanied 'By My Side' with occasional gentle symbols enhanced this number. Music was always perfectly balanced with the volume just right so it always enhanced the vocals rather than playing over them. There was always a good finish to songs with the action flowing into the dialogue which not only made sure the pace was tight but also integrated the story very well.

The vocals and accompaniment from the guitarist and drummer during the last supper scene were very moving and beautifully performed.

Production

The projection of Socrates et al was an innovative idea with the actors appearing on stage in gowns and mortar boards giving a modern feel so there was a mixture of old and new. The first speeches on opening could have been more effective if taken a little slower. The tableaux were visually effective and made good use of the different levels. The mobile decking was innovative and had that surprise element which is always a useful theatrical tool.

Some of the chorus numbers had good sound and harmonies with energy and smiles which added to their power and enjoyment. 'Bless the Lord' (to name but one) for example, was full of life and energy.

The water fight at the beginning which was used I suspect to bring the protests 'up to date' did not really work and perhaps the use of banners would have put the message over better. It wasn't really clear as to why they were fighting (apart from the notes in the programme).

We liked the way in which Jesus was portrayed as a children's presenter which he did extremely well and the cast acting as children was presented in stylized, fun performances.

Not quite sure about having a policeman as one of the characters as expectations of behaviour from such a character was not borne out in the way he was used (i.e. throwing sponges at the beginning and also berating the lawyers) so his behaviour did not collate with his authoritative role.

The duet with 'John' and 'Jesus' was excellent with the chorus entering towards the end of the number finishing in a chorus line which was enjoyable and fun.

Use of the stage was handled very well and there was only one instance of blocking when George Jordan was singing and he could not be fully seen. If the chorus had been kneeling or sitting this could have been prevented.

The contemporary input (even a quote from 'This is Essex') was cleverly devised and the direction obviously made sure that it did not fall into the pantomime genre.

The pace was consistently good and the show flowed from one scene into another quite effortlessly with both Tim Clarke and the musicians playing a big part in this aspect of the production.

Godspell was a real ensemble work of musical theatre and reflected a team working together under positive and creative direction.