

NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION LONDON REGION

Society ; Starmaker
Production ; "MISS SAIGON"
Date ; Friday 7th March 2014
Venue ; Wilde Theatre, Bracknell
Report by ; Henry Hawes – NODA Representative – Area 13

To celebrate 'Starmakers' 25th Anniversary they decided to present three recently released West End Shows (School Editions) namely "*Les Miserables*," "*Cats*" and "*Miss Saigon*" all within the space of 12 months, an enormous challenge, but one which they rose to magnificently, "*Miss Saigon*" being the last of the trio. I first saw this show in 1989 when it first appeared in the West End at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane with Lea Salonga and Jonathan Pryce in the lead. I left the theatre not particularly impressed due to the overplayed spectacle of a full size helicopter descending from the 'fly's', a large American car driven on stage and a large number of oversized banners being waved which totally overshadowed the performers. On Friday 7th March I attended the Wilde Theatre in Bracknell to review Starmaker's production of "*Miss Saigon*" (School Edition) wondering how they would replicate what I had seen in the West End many years ago. I was pleasantly surprised, the performers were not overshadowed by waving banners, helicopters descending and large American automobiles driving on the stage which allowed one to see the actors perform without the audience being distracted by unnecessary spectacle with the result I discovered a first-class telling of the story based on Puccini's "*Madam Butterfly*".

Matt Snape - (THE ENGINEER) – As the owner and pimp of the aptly named nightclub "Dreamland", **Matt** was exceptional in the role. His portrayal showed the character as sly and manipulative and was forever looking to make a profit in any way he could and from any source. This young man has tremendous stage presence – Congratulations on a fine performance.

Ariel Ramchand - (KIM) – This young lady of 15 years showed great maturity in her first major role, her acting ability was of a high standard displaying all the various emotions required. Her feelings towards her American lover 'Chris' could not have been bettered; all this coupled with an excellent singing voice indicates this young lady will go far – Congratulations.

Henry Bearman - (CHRIS) – As the other half of the love duo **Henry** gave us a good feeling for his love of a beautiful Vietnamese girl 'Kim'. **Henry** is another 15 year old who showed a considerable acting ability displaying all the poignancy for the situation he finds himself in relation to the discovery that he is the father of a son by 'Kim' and his need to return to Vietnam to accept his responsibility with a finale of tragic consequences – Very well done.

Zoe Longhurst - (ELLEN) – **Zoe** played the supportive wife very well being a stabilizing influence on his return from the Vietnam War. To help him come to terms with his memories together they return to Vietnam and are by his side when he meets up with 'Kim' and his son. Although not a large part in the overall picture, it was a very important role, one which **Zoe** ensured that the right feelings and characterisation was brought out – Well done.

Ben Tait - (THUY) – This was a well constructed character by **Ben** who is obsessed with 'Kim' and who had been promised her hand in marriage. His change from South Vietnamese to a Commissar in the North Vietnamese army who is not averse to using his extra powers, by force if necessary, to pursue 'Kim' and make her his own could not have been bettered, all the arrogance, possessiveness and cruelty well displayed – Congratulations.

Lee Simmonds – (JOHN) – As the close friend of 'Chris' **Lee** showed his support for his friend, particularly in the way he breaks the news that his friend has a son as a result of his liaison with 'Kim' and subsequently acts as the go-between for 'Chris' to re-unite with 'Kim' and his son – This was a fine portrayal.

Jack Campion / Harry Luff / Fergus Wood Blagrove – (TAM) – On the night of my visit I had no idea which one of the three was playing 'Tam' as there was no indication in the programme on which nights the boys were playing. Whoever was playing this part on the Friday night did a very good job as the young son of 'Kim' showing all the right feelings towards his mother- Well done and I am sure the other two lads were as good.

Phoebe Jackson – (GIGI)

Sophie Harvey – (MIMI)

Liyah Thompson – (YVETTE)

Lili Reakes – (YVONNE) – These four members were excellent as the hostesses at the 'Dreamland' seedy night club frequented by the American servicemen, playing their roles to perfection leaving one in no doubt the main purpose of their occupation – Well done.

Mark Boyer – (ASSISTANT COMMISSAR)

Jacob Smith – (CAPTAIN SCHULTZ)

Nathan Isaac – (CLUB OWNER)

David Wallace – (MARINE CAPTAIN / OFFICER)

Ahley Wilson – (SOLDIER 1 & 2)

Jack Jennings – (SOLDIER 3)

Nathan Cross – (MARINE) – I have combined these seven minor roles together as there was nothing to choose between them, they all presented just the right characterisations for the roles they were playing with good diction and facial expressions fully entering into the spirit of the production – Well done to all of you,

Ensemble

Abi Burrows, Natalie Cox, Noela Doran, Callum Hopcutt, Alex Kitching, Leslie Machin, Katie Mitchell, Jasmine Noel, Amy Pagan, Charlotte Snape, Hannah Tait, Sophie Tait, Hollie Watts, Bruce Williams – This group ensured the stage was filled with good movement in the crowd scenes playing their various characters and lending authenticity to the various

scenes and at the same time lending their singing voices to the various concerted numbers, making an excellent sound.

Dave Savage

Stuart Hayllor – (CO-DIRECTORS) – These two obviously work well together. I was impressed with the casting and the way the various characters had been characterised giving the right interpretation. The feeling between the various performers was well brought out, particularly between ‘Chris’ and ‘Kim’ making them a believable couple. Great attention had been given to the various accents which were well sustained throughout. Staging could not have been bettered with good movement and a well balanced stage throughout – Well done.

Tania Pratt – (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) – It appeared that the cast had been well rehearsed in the music, both principals and chorus with a good balance of voices throughout, all the more so as this is not easy music to sing. **Tania** had gathered together some 13 excellent musicians who played the music precisely, unfortunately the sound balance was totally wrong, as for most of the time the orchestra was playing *fortissimo* which drowned out the performers so that the words could not be heard, a great pity as it spoilt what could have been an outstanding show.

Christina Barlow – (CHOREOGRAPHER) – **Christina** had devised some excellent choreographic routines which were very reminiscent of the original choreography and fitted the action on stage completely. The performers had obviously been well rehearsed in their routines with precise movement – Well done.

Beth Wright – (ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and MUSICAL DIRECTOR) – This young lady was obviously a help to both the director and the musical director considering the standard that was achieved in this production.

Alan Smith – (PRODUCTION MANAGER) – **Alan** as Production Manager ensured that the production met the high standard which is the hallmark of ‘Starmakers’ productions

Stage Manager & Crew – The stage manager had a good control of his stage ensuring that his stage crew worked efficiently in the various scene changes which were smooth and noiseless.

Lighting – A good lighting plot, well cued and which ensured the right atmosphere was generated in the various scenes, the Gobo effects worked very well and gave much to the scenes they were used in – Well done.

Spot Light Operation – The operators on the spotlights ensured they were precise and well focussed.

Sound – The sound plot by **Tom Horrox** for the characters onstage worked very well, it was well balanced with no distortion and good cueing.

Special Effects – It is impossible for most provincial theatre's to be able to replicate a full size helicopter descending from the fly's as in the West End, so theatre's and societies have to cut their cloth accordingly as in this instance by using a filmed version of a helicopter approaching, landing and taking off, together with the appropriate sound effects and which worked very well.

Properties – All properties used looked good and fitted the action on stage.

Set – Supplied by **Scenic Projects** gave a good impression of the various scenes. It was suitably subdued and did not overshadow the performers on stage which can happen in certain shows

Costumes – The design and production of the costumes by **Glynis Smith** and **Cathie Savage** interpreted the period very well with descriptive military uniforms and well designed Vietnamese costumes. They looked clean and well fitting and helped to set the scene for this production.

Make-up – The make-up design by **Joe Stringer** ensured the right characters were depicted on stage. It had been well applied with the assistance of Parents and friends and stood up well under the stage lights.

Programme – A well laid out programme of the right size containing a wealth of information together with clear cast photographs and interesting biographies, all printed on good quality paper and readable in subdued light. It was good to see a programme in this day and age not overwhelmed by adverts – well done.

Front of House – Easily identifiable Front of House staff, friendly and welcoming to their audience.

Thank you for inviting me to your production of *"Miss Saigon"*, and apart from the over-amplified music, was a very pleasant performance. I look forward to your next production with anticipation and wish you all success with it.

Henry

Henry Hawes – NODA Representative – London Region – Area 13.