

National Operatic & Dramatic Association

Report



Society : The Richings Players

Production : Godspell

Date : 11/05/05

Venue : Iver Village Hall

Report by : Steven Jarrett

Wow! What can I say? This was a quantum leap from any show I have seen you do before.

I had a complex - every time I came to see one of your shows I felt as if I was slating it - I didn't want to, but you had failed to reach your full potential before today. I have seen your festival entries in previous years - one of the strongest groups in our area for this. But every time I watched a Ritchings Players production it fell short of my expectations.

This did not - this was class. This is top drawer. You had a great cast, great music and wonderful set and you created an atmosphere before the play started which lifted the whole production up.

This had attack, pace, energy, humour, pathos, great characterizations, interpretation and empathy. In fact it had it all.

Negatives - yes one - the microphones. Why do actors have to rehearse for weeks to get a show to near perfection for technology or lack of rehearsal from the sound crew - I do not know which to let you down in such a big way?

This is easy to get right - why did it go wrong? Start with pieces of wood or unplugged mics to practice with, or even better use them from start to finish if you can.

The band was superb, beautifully balanced and extremely professionally led by your wonderful musical director.

The choreography was excellent; the use of the stage and innovation during the routines was 'par excellence'. The leg dance, the rubber gloves, the use of the two horses and planks was just sheer brilliance.

The direction was even better still, if that is possible. Here you have someone with a passion for this story and an ability to tell it to the audience. The youngest was 7 or 8 the oldest probably in their 80's and yet to a man everyone was captured, reeled in and spell bound from beginning to the end.

The slight shift away from the rock towards the gospel lifted this show above all others.

The set was just inspired; it was so real and yet functional. I loved all the levels you created and the props and costumes equaled this.

Now to nit pick and that is all I can do so forgive me - The projected sign Godspell was wonky and could have been straightened with the keystone on the projector - I told it was nit picky!

The guitarist/busker (Rebecca?) at the beginning could not be heard at all and I would have liked to have had that as background to the slowly building action.

The start (Beautiful City and into the prologue) was the weakest part of the show. The singer's mics was off or down and generally in the prologue, all the singing was the weakest.

Sometimes the main cast of nine's enthusiasm was just too loud for us to hear the storyteller of each fable.

Once the very slightly shaky start was over and upon the entrance of Jesus, the show lifted and went into overdrive and then you gave us an experience never to be forgotten.

Get the cast to pause for a three to five second count before speaking after the end of a song. So many times we wanted to clap but the dialogue had rushed on. They might feel that they have left a pause but believe me if you hold it for, one and two and three - the audience will clap and then wait for this die away before moving on.

There is too much to talk about if I go into specifics and so I pick out some highlights.

My favourite songs were Day by Day and by my side.

Your use of humour and pace and energy was so good that when the pathos came, it hit us like a real death. The audience was moved to tears, your cast was crying and the wonderful harmonic choir was in tears - I have never seen this before and it was just fantastic.

The Programme was excellent too, although we did not know who was except Jesus and John/ Judas. So put photos with names if you can.

This cast of nine thoroughly enjoyed themselves which came through, together with their talent gave us a wonderful show, they were all brilliant, but I have mention a few whose performance stood out above all the rest and made the evening even more special. All of the

actors are talented singers and dancers and actors but parts of their performance was above excellence.

I enjoyed Michael Lucas as John/Judas and Sam Browning as Herb, Flick Caisley as Joanne and Joe Gibbs as Sonia as these were all outstanding performances.

Jason Richards learned his part in a week or so and this alone would be reason for praise but he did not just make up the numbers he added to it.

Sarah Deny-Jones acting off was the best I have ever seen in any amateur theatre and some professionals too, this was self-less acting which helped lift the performance of others on stage. Her facial mask and eyes would worth videoing for the whole show and then letting others see it as an example how to act off.

Charlotte Matty has become twice the actress and singer that I saw in Wizard and that was a good performance. To improve like that in just a few weeks is astonishing - well done Charlotte, you will go far.

Richard Campbell as Jesus was excellent, he lifted the evening and he drove the show on at a fast pace, he conducted the whole evening with control and did it so the audience did not notice - sheer brilliance.

But my favourite performance of the evening and deserves an award, was Rebecca Wood who acted, danced and sang like a professional. Every aspect of her body was used with energy and by the end she looked as if she could give no more. Her face was wonderful; her eyes light up when she looks into the audience and she sings like an angel. Her rendition of "By my side" was the highlight of the evening for me. What a performance.

The chorus and choir were also very good and all wonderful singers and so my congratulations to all and I may be back on Saturday for the matinee and bring some others to see what must be described as an awesome show. Well done and than you for inviting me back despite the fact that I have previously given you a hard time.

Stephen Jarrett, NODA Rep, May 2005