

**CYGNET PLAYERS
"THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE"
20 February 2010
London Oratory School
Stephen Macvicar**

Thank you very much for inviting me to Cygnet Player's production of "Thoroughly Modern Millie" recently at the London Oratory School. Thanks also to Alan Reiss for making the ticket arrangements.

Synopsis

Thoroughly Modern Millie is a high-spirited musical romp that has all of New York dancing the Charleston. It's the zany new 1920's musical that took Broadway by storm! Taking place in New York City in 1922, Thoroughly Modern Millie tells the story of young Millie Dillmount, who has just moved to the city in search of a new life for herself. It's a New York full of intrigue and jazz - a time when women were entering the workforce and the rules of love and social behavior were changing forever. Based on the popular movie, the stage version of Thoroughly Modern Millie includes a full score of new songs and bright dance numbers. Filled with frisky flappers, dashing leading men and a dragon-lady of a villainess audiences will love to hate.

As a result of a reasonably recent successful west end run and the show becoming available to amateur societies, Thoroughly Modern Millie is being performed by societies who can cope with the demands of the show. I wouldn't consider it to be one of my favourite shows, It appears to me that the show is a kind of mish-mash of other better shows such as 42nd Street, Anything Goes with a bit of G&S thrown in.

As a venue, I generally find the London Oratory School a little soulless for stage musical productions. It seems fine for classical concerts etc but lacks atmosphere that musical theatre brings. What the venue does do is that it allows the company to use trucks, fly extra tabs and cloths which worked very successfully in this production alongside a very hard working crew. A Manhattan skyline depicted the setting with Mrs Meers counter upstage left. The opening to the show was nothing short of stunning with plenty of energy and some great facial expressions from the company. The show isn't that particularly heavy on chorus work but what there was handled with flair and precision. What I admired the most I think was the amount of dancing men. A rare commodity indeed these days but the men were impressive. Not that the ladies were any less so but I see dancing men so rarely in modern productions.

Director Jonny Clines was returning to direct a Cygnets production after a four year absence. The ensemble were noticeably well drilled, well directed and brought out much of the humour in the script. Along with Stuart Burrows choreography, the production was slick and entertaining with just the right amount of sparkle. Musical Director Robert Wicks was in charge of a splendid band and an equally talented ensemble who coped splendidly with the jazzy, syncopated score. The general strength in depth on stage for a Cygnets production is very high. Principals and chorus alike sang well. By and large the music in TMM is fairly forgettable but there is no

doubt that strong ensemble vocals were much in evidence and along with some extremely cheesy dialogue were about the high points of the show. Other high points of the show for me were the two production numbers 'Forget About The Boy' and 'Falling in Love'.

Technically, the show was in very good hands. The odd tab came in at the wrong place but was hardly noticed. The costumes were appropriate for the period and plentiful. Millie seemed to change dress with each scene and it was nice to see the iconic red dress.

There are too many named principals to comment on individually but I have written a few notes on some of lead principals;

Millie Dillmount – Helen Bartlett – Helen has a lovely stage disposition, excellent voice and is very watchable. Helen really let go in the 'Gimme Gimme' number and took it up a notch. It was nice to see Helen play comedy so skilfully after a run of several more serious characters

Jimmy Smith – Olly Medicott - Olly impressed as the wise cracking Jimmy who ultimately becomes the object of Milly's affections. Olly doesn't possess the greatest vocals but has a good stage presence and looked good in a sharp suit.

Muzzy – Shana Costa – This was a good performance from Shana as the madcap nightclub singer which was pitched at just the right level

Mrs Meers – Sarah Hurley – This was a lovely part for Sarah to play. Full of menace and sinister qualities, with more than a passing image of Widow Twankey, One of the showstoppers was when she and the two Chinese lads sang Mammy

Trevor Graydon – Jaco Norval – Jaco was tremendously entertaining playing Mr Graydon. His comic timing must be mentioned and his ability to keep pace in the The Speed Test song

Dorothy Brown – Heather Matthews – Heather was wonderful as the ingénue actress Miss Dorothy, whose comic timing and strong voice come together in an impressively hammed-up duet with Graydon

Bun Foo / Ching Ho – Marc Acuna / Kevin Shen – Both of these gentlemen were a breath of fresh air and just let themselves go and had fun. There was plenty of cheesy gags and physical humour to go round

Miss Flannery – Susan Sworn - Susan found a wonderfully OTT character and held it throughout. There was much humour extracted from her awkwardness! and that wig!

There were some lovely cameos amongst the ensemble and indeed some lovely voices coming through to back up your principals. Congratulations to Jonny and his creative team for an entertaining performance and hopefully you will have been able to balance your books accordingly.

The souvenir programme had an excellent layout with plenty of information on the show and the society. Short biogs and especially photographs are always very

welcome as it shows the relevant experience and growth of performers.

Once again thank you for inviting me to the London Oratory School and best wishes for your next productions in May.

I look forward to seeing you again soon and if I can be of any assistance at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindest Regards

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