



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: YAOS Productions

Name of Production: CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG

Venue: Octagon Theatre, Yeovil

Date: Saturday 12th October 2019

Adjudicator: Caroline Whitehead

A thoroughly entertaining afternoon

The vast majority of people coming to see a production like this have the memories of the iconic film firmly in their heads (and for me the professional production that started in London and toured the UK). So am sure it was with trepidation as well as excitement that you decided to take this show on. But you must be feeling so elated that you have accomplished such great things with it, to the delight of your audiences. Indeed, I am pleased that you have it running for 10 days, which gives an even larger number of theatre-goers the chance to enjoy it.

In this show, the opportunities for dramatic and comedic moments are endless; the glorious melodies and powerful lyrics are sure to tug at our heartstrings, as well as the delightful set pieces of comedy and the darker elements that all combine to give us a full gambit of emotional experiences.

What the show also needs is a strong cast and, without exception, I thought you really did achieve that and this carried the show along with a good pace and sustained energy. This show is really quite different from the movie, but you made it your own and did not disappoint anyone watching, judging by the well-deserved applause at the end.

Staging

I see that you had hired the set (good decision) and the car, with its hydraulics. This settled really well into the lovely big stage that you have and was well worth the investment. I could tell that you had rehearsed with a similarly wide and deep space because you used it so effectively and the cast were comfortable making full use of the space. The result of this good direction is that the blocking is airy and versatile and you are able (with the good lighting design you had) to focus on different elements of the story across different parts of the stage. This not only helped to keep up the pace but also smoothed the transitions. Where you did use rolling stock, this was executed swiftly so that the line of drama was not interrupted.

The car (when a wreck), the motorcycle and the restored Chitty were all put to good use and the clever use of lighting for the latter made the flying even more magical. Sound effects were also well timed and levelled for these scenes. Indeed the sound design was strong and set at just the right level. Almost all cues were right on time and this enabled me to forget about sound operation (always a good sign!).

Lighting was nicely designed and managed to capture the very different moods and settings – the beach, the windmill, the toyshop and the dungeons to name but a few. I especially liked the downlighting that you used in ‘Me Ol’ Bamboo’ and the lilac and lemon mixes in ‘Chu Chi Face’. My only reservation in the lighting design was the fairground scene, where I thought you might have made more of that lovely back cyc and perhaps put some festoon lighting through it to make it clearer that this was an evening at the fair. It all looked rather too bright and lost some of the magic perhaps. That said, your follow-spot operator did a great job throughout and the lighting cues were on point.

That opening tableau was very effective and gave the audience time to take in the scene and the context of the story. For me, I also saw how lovely your costumes were and these just got better and better as the story unfolded. The hire of the costumes and set were well worth the expense as they really did support the professional performance as a whole. And I can’t write this review without mentioning the real dog – a real ‘Aw’ moment!

Choreography throughout was so well designed; I loved the fact that you designed movements that suited your performers, that had depth and strong dynamics, as well as fluidity. The entire cast were clearly well-rehearsed in their movements, whether in the big numbers, or when supporting other action on stage and this made for a settled and strong set of pictures. Toot Sweet was your first big ensemble number and this elevated the show to a new dimension, which it maintained for the entire performance.

Caractacus Potts

You reminded me a bit of Eddy Redmayne (that's a compliment) with your elegant style and rather shy nature. Your diction was perfect and you have a really lyrical tone to your singing voice that first came into its own for 'Hushabye Mountain'. Long, well supported phrases really made this number magical and we were treated to a strong performance, especially when you came down to the front of the stage. Importantly, you created a character that had empathy from the audience from the start and this is so important when your role becomes more complex. The developing romance with Truly was well timed and your Jack-in-the-Box number with her in the castle was masterful and a fitting climax to the show. This character, so superbly played all those years ago by Dick Van Dyke (a hard act to follow), is central to the story and you are rarely off stage. I loved the energy that you put into the role and made it your own. This is a complex character and we saw many of the facets as the story unfolds. I really enjoyed your performance.

Truly Scrumptious

You were exactly what the audience was expecting of this character – warm, loving, vulnerable and ultimately brave and heroic. No surprise that Caractacus and his children fall for you. You were fortunate to have those lovely costumes, but what made your performance memorable was your super voice that soared through all those phrases with ease, bright and tuneful with some well-conceived dynamics. We heard every word and felt every emotion along with you. 'Lonely Man' was just beautiful and your clockwork doll was flawless. A really strong performance.

Grandpa Potts

This is quite an important supporting role in the story. You have to express lots of emotions and develop relationships with a lot of cast members – your son, your grandchildren, the Baron, the Inventors. You also have a couple of demanding numbers to pull off. 'Them Three' started off rather tentatively, but once you were in your stride, 'POSH!' was a really strong number and established you as a strong supporting role. I liked your comic timing and your diction was clear. I also liked the intonation in your vocal phrases.

Jeremy Potts (Ewan)

You have a very strong voice and great diction. You were confident on stage and remembered to look out to the audience as well as interact with your sister, father and Truly. Your duet at the picnic on the beach was delightful. You seemed a little too eager to jump into the childcatcher's cart, despite how sinister he looked. Maybe the promise of sweets was just too great.

Jemima Potts (Olivia-Rose)

Your singing voice was perfectly pitched and you demonstrated really good breath control throughout your singing numbers. Well done for convincing us of your affection for Truly and your love for your father. These were intimate moments of great emotional maturity.

Baron Bomburst

The spoilt child in your heart was played to perfection in your interpretation of this role. This duo is at the centre of the comedy in the show and those familiar with the story wait with baited breath for the 'Chu Chi Face' number, which is such an iconic scene. You were comfortable with each other and played your parts with consummate ease. I liked your irascible and impetuous behaviour, which you played larger than life for dramatic effect. Well done.

Baroness Bomburst

YAOS is very lucky to have had your talents at their disposal for this show. You were perfectly cast into this gift of a character and you were clearly having a lot of fun with it. I was impressed with your diction and timing, your domination of the Baron and your strong connection with the audience. Every movement and expression was designed to entertain and you certainly did that.

The Childcatcher

You had a deliciously sinister persona and, from the moment you arrived on stage, you set the scene for what is one of the very few darker moments in the show. I loved your costume, but what made this character come alive was

your slinky and macabre physical movements. One child near me burst into tears at your entrance, such was the menace that you brought to the role. This is only a cameo role but it was memorable and really well played.

The Toymaker

Showing my age now, I have Benny Hill (from the 1968 film) firmly in my mind when I see the stage show and I am sure that was in your mind when finding the character for the toymaker. That said, I think you put your own stamp on it. Your diction was clear and, albeit brief, you fulfilled this role with real commitment.

Boris and Goran

You two are the comic duo that keep popping up throughout the story and I thought that you established your characters really well from the outset. You were obviously enjoying playing the roles as much as we did watching you both. Really strong vocal lines, great comic timing and some really imaginative physical routines. Although you are rather supplementary to the action of the show (inevitably inept but entertaining) your contribution to the overall entertainment was invaluable and I loved your performance. Luke – your wig was delightful!

Lord Scrumptious

This is a tiny role, but you played it thoughtfully – a pompous man who is used to getting his own way, but is clearly devoted to his daughter. We felt some of the warmth coming through the bluster, so well done for that.

Inventors

I loved the picture that you made – a tableau of white haired men with dodgy knees and bent shoulders – but still able to belt out a song and dance routine of sorts. ‘The Roses of Success’ was a thoroughly entertaining number and you clearly had a lot of fun with it. Despite your frailties, we heard every word and this was a nice start to the second act.

Company

For such a large company you made a real impact with Toot Sweet and the Bombie Samba two of my highlights. I was also very impressed with your male ensemble. 'Me Oi' Bamboo' and 'Roses of Success' were well danced and really well sung with great diction and good breath control. This show is really challenging for the ensemble crew because there is such a lot to do and so many costume changes but you did a first class job and created a truly strong support for the lead characters to work with. You sang with all your hearts and souls and this was evident in the applause you received. I'm so glad you enjoyed the performance and I hope that you sustain this energy right through your long run.

Orchestra

As with all pit orchestras, you have a key role in supporting the entire production but if you do the job well your efforts can go largely unnoticed. As a pit player myself and former MD, I know only too well what an important job you do in maintaining the pace and the drama of the show – and, importantly, allowing for pauses where appropriate.

From the moment this band struck up for the overture and the audience began to clap I knew that were in for a musical treat. I was keeping a sharp, listening ear on your sound throughout the show and I was really impressed with how sensitively you supported your performers. Well done to the Musical Director, who demonstrated an ability to really feel the phrases and pauses that are so essential in this show. And also congratulations to a really accomplished percussion section.

This was a very well cast and well directed production and I enjoyed some top quality individual performances. You managed to achieve moments of poignancy as well as comedy for maximum dramatic effect. It was a story well told and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Thank you for your hospitality in the interval and I wish you well for your future productions.

CJW

16.10.19