The Great British Bake Off Musical

YAOS
The Powell Theatre - Sherborne
2-30pm - Saturday October 31st, 2026

Somerset Fellowship of Drama – David Beach Competition

Introduction

I had never seen this particular show before although it was sort of on my radar. I was lucky enough to see the original London production of the *first* musical to be based on *The Great British Bake Off.*
It was called *The Bakewell Bake-Off* and premiered in London in 2013, and I remember absolutely loving every minute of it with its rather inevitable *Northern humour*.
In 2015 an amateur production was presented by one of our David Beach competing drama groups… and this time I was lucky enough to be included in the cast.
It was a joyous experience and so I was really looking forward to attending your production of a relatively new show which I was pretty sure would be fabulous for all the reasons YAOS would *expect* it to be fabulous!
And I certainly wasn't disappointed!

Choice of Show

This – *to my knowledge* – is the first entry into the David Beach competition of this show being a relatively new release to amateur groups.
Any brand new show is a risk for any amateur group as every aspect has to be created from scratch and new shows don't always attract full houses.
But – *and it's a big but* – when the show is based on a TV phenomenon that is currently attracting a larger audience than the newly revamped *Strictly Come Dancing* – you're probably on a reasonably strong bet that things will turn out OK.

Good choices can only really be assessed after the event and from your point of view there will be many considerations to take into account.

1. Was the venue – *away from your usual town* – a good decision?
2. Did you maintain your high standard of production values and performance?
3. Did this new show appeal to your loyal audience?
4. Did you cover all your costs along the way?
5. Did you enjoy presenting the show!

My answers to these questions are:

1. Definitely – the venue size and internal appearance added to the production and *Sherborne* is surely one of the most obvious *afternoon tea* towns in the area!? – this alone will have attracted a significant new audience I'm sure.
2. Hell, yes!
3. Everyone loved it.
4. I don't know – but it absolutely deserved to do well financially.
5. You obviously did!

Auditorium Pre-set & Welcome

All the front of house team were welcoming, and the inner foyer was dressed to theme the whole experience for the audience.
And a quick chat with Luke Whitchurch before going into the auditorium would be enough to lift anyone's spirits!
The open and clearly defined set was really lovely to walk into – the panelled vaulted ceiling visible through the lighting rig and the huge dresser and run of benches really made it feel as though we had walked into the tent to watch a recording of the TV show!
Brilliantly evocative.

Direction

The phrase herding cats comes to mind! What a huge task to undertake the direction and choreography with a relatively fast moving show and the actual staging being complicated enough before you even start to work with the actors!
I am thinking you were so fortunate with the quality and experience of your cast and the significantly numbered backstage and production-value volunteers.
This doesn't detract from the daunting (but exciting) prospect of embarking on a debut directorial role...with a new show…and the YAOS reputation to maintain.

The character development comes partly of course from the writing but also the rehearsal process and the interaction between the characters as set and guided by the director. In this show the eccentricities, the traits and personalities – *and the differences in them* – were really well drawn without any real caricatures. Even the over-the-top hosts and larger than life characters of Izzy, Dezza, Babs and of course Pam were carefully controlled to keep their characters *real.*
The huge acting area enabled everyone in the audience to enjoy every moment as there was no masking or lack of space in the danced numbers and the busy sequences.
Working everything out and then rehearsing it relentlessly to get everything running smoothly in the way it did, requires great planning, imagination, determination and leadership.
For me this was directing at it's best…and possibly the most challenging.
Given that this director/choreographer has something of a powerhouse reputation within the SFOD as a performer, I am delighted to have been the adjudicator to have witnessed this first time venture which turned out to be nothing short of *truly scrumptious* – to use a vaguely baking expression!

Set Design

The various elements of the set may have developed organically as the plans were made and there may have been significant input from a number of people which is perhaps why no-one is *credited in the programme specifically* as the *set designer*.
The overall design was so good I would have loved to have been able to congratulate the design team by name as I was really impressed with how what on the face of it appeared a simple set, was in fact so robust, well-dressed and painted, it would sit perfectly well within a professional production.
The magnificence of the backdrop dresser, so skilfully painted with the lower panelling effect, was truly impressive. It was dressed with such thoughtfulness including the photographs chosen with such relevance. Perhaps the majority of the audience would not have seen them close up and appreciated the significance of them – but I sneaked a closer look during the interval.
It's like the *Balenciaga scarf* in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* – for anyone who knows the lyrics of that musical well enough!
The shelving and props thereon gave the perfect feel of tradition, location and familiarity that would have surely made everyone feel – even before the start of the show – that we were in for a treat. *And so we were*.
The opening sequence of the caveman origin of the cake was enhanced by the lovely campfire and oven construction and as the show progressed the robust benches doubled as, amongst other things, the catwalk. The well-constructed washroom cubicles matched the clean lines and colours of the rest of the set to give another location.

The set design and the easy manoeuvrability of the benches ensured the cast had the maximum performance space and of course enabled the flow of the show to be uninterrupted keeping the audience engagement and focus constant which is something that many productions fail to achieve to this level and why the time simply flew by.
The design, construction and painting teams for this production will no doubt have been very pleased with the result of their efforts – quite rightly too.
There may have been other set designs in the David Beach Competition that have impressed us for all sorts of reasons – but few will have achieved the level of *appropriateness* as this one.
Perfect.

Stage Management

This is the longest list of backstage crew I have ever seen in an SFOD show programme – *and I'm not surprised.*
Then there are the on-stage TV crew actors who also contribute to the significant backstage/on stage function.
The speed and co-ordination with which things changed in front of us – *often choreographed* – was simply astonishing and extremely admirable.
Within the frenetic endeavour to keep the pace up and the show story from lagging, everyone had to be on their toes …and know exactly what they were doing.
Rehearsals must have been so challenging!
This was a remarkable achievement in what for you was an unfamiliar space.
I do not underestimate the skilful management required to create a safe environment and a completely professional looking production.

Props

Where do I even begin!
Never have I seen a show so reliant on this department of the production team.
This was a truly astonishing achievement with significantly large showstoppers, multiple offerings of the (correctly) varying levels of achievements within the baking categories – from flat cheesecakes to burnt offerings!
The dresser set props were delightful and so well thought out and the hand props for the baking preparation sequences all looked right.
Bowls, utensils (some as microphones), the stools, the scone-boxing ropes, the Blackpool ropes and light barriers…and all that dough!
It was so the right decision to *mime* many of the ingredients which ensured the flow of the show wasn't interrupted by unnecessary clean-up operations!

I often think that props aren't really noticed and appreciated by our audiences to the deserved degree, but I think on this occasion everyone in your audience will have talked about the props in this show with great admiration.
Whoever designed and actually made the pastry offerings, later put on display in the foyer, deserve all the praise they will have received from the company during the rehearsal period – truly amazing.
And the showstoppers were…well, *showstopping*!
It doesn't surprise me that the Props team credited in the programme is so extensive – but hats off to the stage crew who had to manage them all during the run – both onstage and within the wings.
Without you things could have been a disaster!!
Needless to say, if ever there was a show in which the backstage function required as much - if not more skill and focus than the actors – then this is it.
Congratulations.
Teamwork makes the dreamwork!

Sound

The sound was provided with professional support and this showed.
The cueing and the balance between the tracks and the vocals was really good.
I did think that many of the *tracks* were really *bassy* which seemed to create a *slight* imbalance overall between the *supporting music* and the *vocals.*
I am no technician and don't have a real grasp of how the sound desk works – but think it *might have been possible* to have reduced the deep bass sound that dominated some of the musical numbers.
I do realise that it is often the bass line that supports the rhythm of the song and is needed when a melody line isn't so obvious but, although my mind kept returning to it, this certainly didn't detract from my enjoyment.
In the *Slap it Like That* number it needs a strong bass which added to the genre – so I am certainly not referring to that song.
Many of the songs are full of gentle pathos – *Grow, Rise*, and *My Dad* to name some of them.
The sound balance on these was particularly good which really enhanced the emotion – so often this genre of song is over-amplified into a *cabaret style* whereas here the balance was so good, the sound was really *natural* and not *perceivably* amplified at all - *which heightened the narrative.*
Professional sound eats up a significant percentage of an amateur show's budget – and is *worth every penny* when managed in the way it was in this production.
I suspect your *newbie* audience from the Sherborne area will have been well impressed with the technical aspects of the show – including the sound.
Your regular YAOS audience – like me – will have, I'm sure, thought your high standards of professional support has been well maintained.
Great job.

Lighting Design and Technical Achievement

Some shows are often referred to as a costume show, or a dance show or maybe a lighting show …
I doubt many of the audience would use these terms for this production and it is true that our audiences don't always realise that a *realistic* show which is set in the modern era can be so enhanced by a well thought out lighting plot.
The added requirement for the *inhouse created technical presentation* on the TV screen set centre stage on the dresser, will perhaps have been a subliminal aspect for many of those who live their lives looking at a screen…particularly if they are TV addicts!
There were some great lighting moments from the changes in the opening caveman sequence – to the paparazzi style with Izzy on the red carpet.
The whole rather dream like sequence created and shown on the screen of Phil was a brilliant visual pastiche of the sentiment being sung about on stage.
The Blackpool lights on the barrier ropes looked really effective and the bright showtime lighting for *Keep on Keeping on* were just two of so many lighting states that reflected the mood of the scene.
Isolation of particular areas such as Pam's lectern, the washrooms and the various company freezes were well executed and overall, the lighting plot was well designed and well executed - enhancing this lively and joyous production.

Costume

From the get-go the costumes were all so evocative of the TV show you were looking to recreate. From the ridiculousness of the silly opening sequences that the TV programme offers each week – in this case the caveman scene with the traitor-like cloaks for the *crew* – to the *ordinarily random* appearance of the contestants, so *carefully chosen* to help define their characters and back-stories, the entire costume plot was *subtly very specific* – and spot on.
There were some lovely highlights in the costume plot with some flashy changes for Jim and Kim and of course the inevitable and visually eccentric – *and beautifully created character* – Pam.
The additions to the crew costumes of the red accessories for the opening of Act II and of Pam's very sparkly tap-routine dress gave a great lift to an already impressive second half opening.
The rather quick scene for the boxing scones made the elaborate scone costumes for Phil and Pam particularly surprising and really funny – well done to whoever took on the task of creating them for such a limited exposure time!
It might not, *per-se*, have been a *costume show* …but the costuming was absolutely *per-fect* - with many highlights and a true representation of the environment you were looking to portray.

Hair & Make-up

This show has little opportunity for character make-up with all the cast requiring a modern natural look and to be honest it is only when I think someone is *overly made-up* that I tend to comment.
There were, however, a few noticeable achievements in the make-up department even though no-one is credited in the programme as make-up supervisor – and so I am guessing everyone did their own – so to speak.
Pam's make up was outstanding giving us an almost *facsimile* of Prue Leith which delighted the audience so much.
In fact, with the combination of costume, hair and make-up I'm sure the less enlightened in the audience might have believed it truly *was Prue!*
I liked how the somewhat deluded Jim managed to build his part in the whole TV programme with added layers of make-up that looked fabulous!
So typical of some of our real-life flamboyant TV presenters who a few generations ago would have not been universally admired - but who, nowadays, attract admiration and a growing fan base.
Lily looked really cute with her plaited hair, and I dare say someone else helped with that – if you did them yourself …*then well done you!!*

Musical Direction

One might think that any show presented without the support of a live band and instead the use of backing tracks was, if not an *easy option*, perhaps an *easier* option.
Of course, there are advantages in using backing tracks including the consistency of sound and the opportunity for *at-home* rehearsals – but the unforgiving tracks don't allow the usual level of *control on the night* that an MD loves to have.
Control that allows for dealing with problems in performance and in developing interpretation, as well as also giving a level of excitement for all concerned that you sometimes only get with a live band.
The part of the job that requires the MD to instil confidence in the performers and help to develop characterisation through song is still paramount.
In this show I felt that the MD must have spent so much time and dedication to achieve the delightful level of harmonies that were on offer in much of the singing and in helping the cast understand and appreciate the vulnerabilities within the score and lyrics to help deliver the lovely more gentle pathos that is required in quite a few of the numbers.
I think my earlier comments about the *bass* imbalance of the *tracks* are clearly not in the control or resolve of the MD, but a technical issue – or maybe an oversensitivity on my part?

Choreography & Dancing

The choreography was very much an integral part of the production because so much of it wasn't about *steps* in the usual sense.
Yes, there were many choreographic *danced* highlights - not least of all the lovely *Keep On Keeping On* and the *Slap it Like That* numbers – and heaven knows how much one-to-one training was involved in teaching Dezza to twerk like he was in the Notting Hill Carnival!
But it was the *posed* choreography that really impressed me, notably *Obviously* on the red carpet – sharp, stylised and posed choreography so reminiscent of Kate Hudson's song *Cinema Italiano* in the film version of *Nine.*
If you don't know the film, google 'Kate Hudson Cinema Italiano' and you'll see exactly what I mean.
Somewhere in the Dough had the best *baking bowl choreography* I've ever seen!
The *setting* (is that a more appropriate word rather than choreography for this number?) for *Slap it Like That* was absolutely joyful and for me a highlight in the ensemble numbers.
I loved the boyband feel with the stools and utensil microphones – not choreography exactly but the hybrid of direction and choreography – as was much of the armography in various numbers.
The sharp turn of heads, the looks, the leans – all so well timed and synchronised making all the movement impressive – *and in character*.
Even the simplest of things done accurately by a number of people reminds us of the saying about the end result being greater than the sum of the parts.
Much of the choreography in this production was *exactly that.*

Individual Performances

Babs – Sian Spencer

Such a great sassy mature character – just like Debbie Webster on Coronation Street – beautiful, full on and *so likeable.*
Really well-acted and with the 11o'clock song *Babs Lament* you gave us pathos, delicious euphemisms and a characterised performance all wrapped up in leopard skin, sincerity and a lovely singing voice.
An actress who knows how to hold an audience in the palm of her hand and who instils confidence in an audience from the start.
I'm not sure I would ever have been brave enough to ask her for a date though!

Ben – Ed Creswick

If an adjudicator used the phrase "as expected" about a *performance*, some actors might feel slighted.
I am hoping that you will know that my thoughts about your portrayal of a widower striving to keep things as normal as possible for his young daughter is absolutely the opposite of a *slight* when I say your performance – *because I have enjoyed your performances for many years* – was *as expected.*
This portrayal was truly heartwarming, endearing, stoic and romantic – all at the same time and showed not only your amazing and easy vocal range in song (for which you have been lauded for decades) but also the strong and natural acting talent that – *in my opinion* – has been perfected over the same period.
Your very believable relationships with both Lily and Gemma were underplayed in exactly the right way and your duet with Lily was particularly moving – it made me think of *Caractacus Potts* singing *Hushaby Mountain* to his children.
Heartfelt.
Your performance as Ben was – *I imagine* – exactly as the *author intended*.
And… *as I expected it would be.*
I did smile as you were the only actor to noticeably (*noticed by me anyway!*) move to find their light when several of you bobbed up from behind the benches into a spotlight.
There's a veteran performer I thought!
And any resemblance to Gary Barlow singing on a bar stool was, I am sure, purely coincidental!

Dezza – Josh Singer

In the *Slap it Like That* song the entire company were fully utilised but just the one delightful twerking masterclass from you!
Once spotted, I, like everyone else I'm sure, couldn't look anywhere else.
For me, this was definitely the scene-stealing *icing on the cake* of a wonderfully entertaining number!
The desire to return after being sent home was always really funny and the chasing off by Stephy on a couple of occasions was so well executed – not a *Keystone Cops* chase but a really realistic dodging in desperation.
Great singing voice and such a warm likeable character creation that I suspect is very much who you are in real life.
Please don't wait another twenty five years before performing again as by that time so many of us will have passed away and will miss it.

Francesca – Helena Reid

With only a slight hint of an accent your diction was perfect, with your dialogue and song always delivered with such gentleness and sincerity.
As a first time audience member for this show, I knew nothing of the characters' backstories and, as I hadn't read the script (deliberately) I was also hearing the back stories unfolding in real time.
Your first hint of not having children made me well-up a bit – with you just saying, as a teacher, that there weren't little ones at home was so delicately revealed your heartbreak shot over the footlights and landed in my chest.
Not having had children myself – and never really thinking about it or regretting it – I was surprised that this sequence in the show did bring me up short – a testament to the thought that you and the director perhaps put into portraying this character's back story.
An example *of not trying to hard* or *over thinking* delivery – keeping it natural and *understanding* – and *feeling* – what you are saying.
Honestly – *not everyone can do that.*
Your conversation with Hassan outside the washrooms was so believably caring – some might say it was easy for you and Charlie – but I suspect it was actually more difficult than many might think?
Your song *Grow* was a gift from the writers – one of those that the audience hang on every word because of the unfolding story within – but only if it's delivered with a great vocal and is sung from the heart.
It so was.
Thank you.

Gemma – Esmée Roach

The first proper conversation with Ben was really well handled and your character's nervousness came over as genuine and not *acted.*
The *Somewhere in the Dough* song was beautifully acted and sung.
From the moment you talked about your *redundancy* through to the *kiss*, we witnessed your growth in confidence and fulfilment and a real transformation from a rather *lost* character to a woman with a future outside the tent!
I really enjoyed watching your journey in the tent which I guess in many ways is the most complete of all the contestants.
The developing relationship with Ben was like watching one of those period dramas on TV where you find yourself thinking on more than one occasion - ***just kiss*** - as you witness the tension between two people building up.
A very well measured performance with your experience and talents shining through.

Hassan – Charlie Woof

I wonder if at times, as a comparatively less experienced actor, both theatrically and in real life, you might have felt slightly overwhelmed, intimidated or overshadowed by the level of experience and talent that surrounded you?
If you did… *it was unfounded.*
This was really inspired, appropriate casting and in my opinion none of the other cast members could have portrayed Hassan in the youthful physical way you were able to.
The naivety and vulnerability of the character really shone through which it *might* perhaps not have with an older actor.
I feel that your performance was up with the best of them and with a rap that was absolutely on it, a great vocal ability and a natural performance style you nailed this role.
Seemingly easily.
Your revelation speech about Syria and your experience was *sadly and genuinely realistic* and I think it might have made some in the audience re-think their views on such things.
And that's a good thing.

Izzy – Jessamy Bowditch

This was a great vocal performance and particularly in the *Obviously* number on the red carpet.
There's no doubt it was a self-obsessed and sassy characterisation, but I wonder if the audience *disliked* Izzy quite as much as her misdemeanours *deserved?*
I couldn't quite make up my mind if she either wasn't as bad as she made out – or if the characterisation needed a sharper and more pointed level of nastiness?
Is she the villain of the piece? I wasn't sure.
Visually and vocally, this was a strong performance and of course nicely differentiated from the other characters.

Russell – David Hallett

One of your lines references the endearment of the underdog, quirky contestant to the audience of the TV show.
I think *your portrayal* of this character did exactly the same for you and endeared *you* to the *theatre audience* because it was so well drawn, measured and *unpointed.*
So often actors *point* the funny lines with just that little bit *too much emphasis* and consequently they lose much of the humour that *you* gained by simply *saying the line*. I think we knew that you wouldn't make the final …but we were with you all the way as we all loved your characterisation.

Jim – Bevan Webber

This was a lovely portrayal of the over-the-top host making a visually and vocally strong characterisation. Some lovely delivery of the funny lines referring to other TV shows and a great relationship with Kim - so reminiscent of *daytime TV duos* where they bounce off of one another.
A lovely, controlled flamboyance that seemed to layer-up for Act II and reminded me of the reverse layering in the Elton John movie – *Rocketman.*
Suitably camp and swishy…and then I read you love animals too!
What's not to like?

Kim – Charlie Wanklin

Not to be outdone by Jim this was an equally confident, *in your face* performance ensuring the TV show moved on quickly.
From the delightful opening caveman sequence you really differentiated between your on screen and off screen personas.
Proving your vocal prowess and ability to really act a character – I could hardly believe that *Audrey* had transformed into such a diva!

Pam – Karen Pankhurst

This for me was the standout performance of the production.
A force to be reckoned with in any performance role or HOD, Karen commits 100% to anything she does and always comes out on top.
The intention in the writing and the description of the role is of course to emulate – or at least give yours/or the director's interpretation of *Prue Leith*.
Here – *between you* – you worked to create the absolute embodiment of Ms Leith to the absolute thrill of the audience.
From top to toe – *literally the hair style to the coloured pumps* – you honestly completely looked the part and then gave us a soft, convincing vocal impersonation of the lady herself.
I found myself beaming at your every interjection in the story and your Act II number *Keep On Keeping On*, was lyrically lovely – *no credit to you!* – and performed to perfection – *every* credit to you, the supporting on stage crew and of course the director.
Your duet with Phil was such a *Cole Porter* moment delivered with a twinkle in the eye and sense of slight patronisation towards Phil – which you put over with a smile and that knowing look of who's really the boss.
The attention to detail with your total appearance was worth all the effort as you wore your costumes with sophisticated aplomb and sailed through the show with apparent ease.
This wasn't acting – *it was embodiment*… and I loved it.

Phil – Matthew Maisey

A well-placed and contrasting characterisation to Pam and the contestants. Mildly aloof: -tick. Handsome: -tick. Twinkly eyed: -tick. Vocally strong: -tick. You could say Phil certainly ticked all *my* boxes.
And to quote from one of your lines in the brilliant patter duet with Pam – *I'd happily be your Panda* – and to quote Babs – *"yes…that is a euphemism!* Following your flouring of the rolling pin I think I can get away with that one!? You clearly took your starting point from the other PH but certainly developed your own smarminess – ok *charm* if you prefer! – and your interest in Babs added to the humanisation of the rather standoffish persona we might have expected, creating a much more likeable fictional character. All good I say.

Lily – Matilda Reeves and Ivy Raye Neale

What a lovely opportunity for a young performer to not only create this rather complex character but to work alongside the adult actors in this company. From the photos and the biogs I am thinking Matilda and Ivy Raye are probably like *two peas in a pod*.
I am sure that having enjoyed Matilda's performance immensely I would have enjoyed Ivy Raye's just as much as so many people I spoke to, told me how *fabulous* you *both were*.
This is a complex role because you have to show yourself to be stoic – as children so often are in the years following a parent's passing – and also devoted to your father as well.
Lily needs to also show vulnerability but an acceptance of change and the joy that this can bring.
You did this really well with your very clearly defined dialogue and demeanour and of course your singing voice was absolutely perfect which added a layer of *completeness* to your total performance. *I bet you can even make cakes as well!*

TV Crew – Stephy Bussell, Christopher Holman-Holmes, Amy Phelps, Charmayne Hooper, Elishia Hooper, Sophie Upham.

Great support to the main characters from the get-go.
From the traitorous opening in the cloaks to the constant baking preparations, the *Men in Black* for the red carpet *Obviously* number and the wonderful tap routine with Pam, you were all fully animated and focused exactly as a TV crew would be. Whilst the *use* of the *TV crew* to keep the show moving was brilliant there is no doubt that the individual characterisations and the step out moments for all of you, resulted in you all having real *personalities.*

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We had a great afternoon in the tent having been treated to *Star Baker Parking* in the school and having had a lovely lunch at *The Pear Tree* in Half Moon Street beforehand.
What a delight to visit Sherborne for the first time ever and enjoy all it had to offer.
I suspect many of your audience were new to YAOS, living in or around Sherborne with this perhaps being their first YAOS show.
I was rather taken aback to see in the audience, one of my own childhood TV programme presenters. At the age of 89 and living on the outskirts of Sherborne (*thanks Wikipedia!*) *Valerie Singleton*, of *Blue Peter* renown, was sitting in the auditorium perhaps enjoying one of your productions for the first time – *and enjoy it she did!*

Departing Sherborne with my bottle of wine that I won with pink ticket 447 was the icing on the cake – *if you'll pardon the obvious pun!*

Thank you to everyone involved in this uplifting, inspiring and wholesome show for such a lovely – *and rather British afternoon!*

I know that I am considered by some as being a waffling adjudicator – but I hope you will have enjoyed reading my waffle as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Get it? …. *waffle*….

Andy Marchant
Adjudicator – David Beach Awards