The Great British Bake Off – Books & Lyrics by Jake Brunger, Music & Lyrics by Pippa Cleary

Review

Date: 31 October 2026
Society: Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society
Venue: Powell Theatre
Type of production: Musical
Director: Jennifer Holland-Brewer
Musical Director: Lucy Singleton
Choreographer: Jennifer Holland-Brewer
Lighting: Fabian Barrow-Blanken
Sound: Eli Burton

As seen by Sara Leat, NODA SW District 6 Representative

This was my first time watching this musical, and what a fantastic introduction it proved to be, thanks to a stellar performance by this talented group. As a fan of the television programme, I found the setting familiar, but the stories behind the scenes were fresh and original.

From the moment I entered the auditorium, I felt at home, thanks to the warm welcome from the front-of-house team. The open set recreated the baking tent, with a large dresser forming the back wall, a television screen at its centre and eight bakers' benches ready for the hopeful contestants.

The set designer and construction team deserve congratulations for creating a well-proportioned set that allowed the full cast to move freely during the large company numbers. The scene changes were slick and tightly choreographed, with the on-stage television crew doubling as stagehands to maintain the narrative flow. A particular strength of Jennifer Holland-Brewer's direction was the absence of 'dead air'; ingenious swapping raw dough for completed showstoppers mid-scene conveyed the passage of time and maintained the illusion of a ticking competition clock.

The props also deserved special mention, particularly the fantastic array of replica cakes. These brought visual delight to the baking tent and gave the contestants' creations their all-important moment in the spotlight. Much more than decoration, they helped sustain the illusion of a genuine baking competition. The cakes were a highlight in their own right — a feast for the eyes, even if they were not destined for the tasting table!

The television crew moved around the contestants to 'film' the show's close-ups, adding an authentic sense of television production and giving the presenters a natural focus for their interactions.

The production benefited from an exceptional cast. The presenters, Jim and Kim, were the comic glue of the evening, sharing a wonderful rapport and infectious energy. The judges, Phil and Pam, helped build the competitive tension. These actors had clearly done their homework, meticulously recreating Paul Hollywood's and Prue Leith's mannerisms and bringing a sharp, hilarious authenticity to their roles.

Stealing the show was the young actress playing Lily. With such natural charm and assured stage presence, she captured the audience's heart and delivered one of the standout moments of the show with her song 'My Dad'.

The well-matched cast of contestants gave the show its cohesion. The flirtatious and much-married Babs provided a perfect comic contrast to the entitled and scheming Cambridge student Izzy, while the chaotic and shambolic vegan Dezza complemented the upright, precise and slightly camp engineer Russell. The emotional core came from the budding romance between Ben and Gemma, played with subtlety and tenderness. Completing the line-up was the young and talented Syrian refugee Hassan, played with enthusiasm and sincerity. However, it was Francesca, the Italian baker, who delivered the show's most unexpectedly poignant moment. Her solo song 'Grow' used baking as a heartbreaking metaphor for her personal struggles. For me, this was another highlight: beautifully sung with emotional depth, it offered a tender pause amid the pace and fun of the show.

Having the director also serve as choreographer was clearly a bonus: the dancing was woven naturally into the staging of the songs. The television crew, doubling as stagehands and dancers, seemed to float on and off stage, with nothing forced or out of place. The dancing was precise and clean, especially in the tap number, contributing to the production's polished finish.

Musically, the cast soared under the guidance of musical director Lucy Singleton. Their vocal discipline was evident in the immaculate timing of the layered, multipart songs. These complex numbers required distinctive melodies and countermelodies to be woven together while building the tension and energy of the competition. As contestants dropped out, the melodies and harmonies were redistributed, demonstrating the cast's talent and versatility.

The sound and lighting supported the production sympathetically, complementing the staging and music without drawing attention away from the action. Their contribution helped keep the storytelling at the forefront and allowed the evening's humour and warmth to shine through.

The success of this production lay not simply in recreating a much-loved television show, but in bringing its stories to life with warmth and heart. The assured direction, seamless staging, sparkling choreography and impressive musical precision combined to create an evening in which the comedy never overshadowed the tender moments. Everyone on stage and behind the scenes contributed to that

achievement, making this a company triumph in the fullest sense. I could not have wished for a better introduction to this musical: a production full of laughter, humanity and care, with all the ingredients of a thoroughly memorable evening. This was far more than a successful bake — it was a theatrical showstopper.

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Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what they see at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance, and it is inevitable that their assessment will be affected by that knowledge.
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