



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: YAOS PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production: **'KINKY BOOTS'**

Venue: Octagon Theatre, Yeovil

Date: 17th March 2022

Adjudicator: Gerry Parker

Funny, Fantastic, & Fabulous! is how this show is described on the front of your programme, but for me that does not fully describe this production, in some ways it is in fact a little misleading. Yes, it is funny, at times in this production hilariously so, and whilst I am always a little suspicious of that much over used word, 'Fantastic', 'Fabulous!' is a true description of the costumes, wigs, makeup, boots, kinky and others, on display. I know that apart from the in-house makeup and hair teams, these items were brought in from an outside source, but it was members of YAOS who chose them and then ensured that they were not only fit for purpose but used to their full potential. It would also be fair to use the word 'fabulous' to describe the excellently created, very informative programme. All those involved in the design, printing and content of this can take a bow.

You may ask, therefore, why did I use the word misleading in my introductory sentence. The reason is that they give the impression that the show is just out to give the audience a fun evening, when in fact there are some very strong dramatic themes running through the story. Themes which were explored to great effect in this production. The idea that we should accept people for what they are, rather than what we feel they ought to be was strongly explored throughout.

Sixty five years after Sir John Wolfenden's committee published its recommendations in 1957 that homosexuality should cease to be regarded as an illegal act, it took a further ten years before the recommendations became law and there are still many people and places where there is a stigma surrounding that part of society. Certainly in the late 1990's when this show is set, as reflected in some of the characters within the story, there was still a strong anti reaction towards homosexuals. On stage and film the

tendency was, in past years, to use the subject and people to create comedy, and some homosexuals used it as a defence mechanism playing the camp character for all they were worth. There is plenty of that type of humour in this script, and an obvious temptation to garner as many cheap laughs as possible from such situations. Whilst quite happy to take advantage of some of these comedy opportunities, the Director and Actors involved in this production never merely went for the easy options. They recognised the more serious themes lurking just below the surface and never lost sight of them. The result was a well balanced production that put real people on stage. People you could believe in and sympathise with the problems and challenges they faced.

A well designed Lighting Plot enhanced the visual side of the show, those sudden bursts of Red, which filled the stage most effectively, were, as I believe were all the effects, cued and presented immaculately. The Stage Director and her teams were also right on the ball, making sure that the production went as smoothly as if mounted on well-oiled runners.

Intertwined with these swift, smooth changes of venue was the movement arranged by the choreographer. I say movement rather than dance, because although there were dance movement within the big production numbers, and Lola and the Angels' input, it was the way in which the whole company was used to build and point a moment within a number that demonstrated the skill of the choreographer, just as well as the solo skills of the more specialised dancers.

How nice to find so many musicians hiding down in the orchestra pit, and an MD who knew exactly the style of music she wanted them to produce. Apart from a couple of numbers in Act 2 when the orchestra became a little too exuberant, dominating the singers, the MD never allowed the musicians to forget their function as support to the vocalists, solo and chorus. When they were given the chance to let rip in order to underline a big moment, they did so with musical skill and great gusto.

With such quality backing from the off-stage creative teams, the actors had little, or no, excuse for not making the most of the vocal and dramatic material placed before them. How well they did we can now examine under Individual performances.

Charlie Price

I can remember when my father died, leaving me with a business, not as big, but in a rather sounder position than the one Charlie inherited, thinking that now I could bring in all those changes that I thought he did not understand. Like Charlie I quickly came to realise that he was rather wiser and knew more about the business than I, at that moment, did. Several years elapsed before I was aware how much his death had knocked me off balance, looking back I then realised how many poor decisions I made during that period.

Your relationship with your father is only sketched in, yet you were still able to clearly define it, and the knock-on effect of your attitude and response to the workers within the factory. Dramatically, from the outset this was a finely drawn character, as was the on-off engagement to Nicola, and almost love-hate relationship with Lola/Simon. You took the characterisation into the vocals, and whilst you seemed to be more dominant of the role dramatically than vocally, there was no question of you being

one character when speaking and another when singing. I felt for you when the 'Charlie's Soliloquy' number came up. Like that almost tuneless, near off-key 'Lonely Room' number in Oklahoma that Judd has to sing in the Smoke House, it is a 'basket' to sing, and even when done well is not likely to draw any great rounds of appreciative applause for the singer from the audience.

Having been challenged dramatically by the Director, vocally by the MD and used quite extensively in the Ensemble numbers by the Choreographer, you were then challenged to walk with your feet encased in very high heeled boots. I would say that considering the easy way, or at least it looked easy, you first tottered and then walked confidently on them in the final number, that you had mastered that challenge as well as you had mastered the others placed before you.

Lola/Simon

If ever a role was begging to be over-acted this is it. You are positively encouraged to 'camp' it up in the initial stages of the performance, and later when playing up to the girls in the factory. Not having been privy to the early rehearsals I do not know whether your interpretation needed to be reined in, like an over keen, two year old thoroughbred race horse excited by the crowd on their first outing in public, or you were always in control of the characterisation. Either way the finished article suggested that you and the Director were now, and probably had been from the outset, singing off the same hymn sheet.

In 'The Land of Lola' and 'The Sex is in the Heel' routines you quickly established yourself as the leader of the pack, the Angels were decidedly your backing group. Thinking back to the first time I saw this show. after those numbers I was expecting one or two solos from your good self, but as we all now know we have to wait until deep in the second act before the big solo number 'Hold me in Your Heart' arrives. Again, here is a moment that can easily be overplayed, sentiment taking over from sincerity, ruining the effectiveness of the number. Once again we found your judgement of the mood of the moment extremely good. This was no overdressed, over made-up Drag Queen, this was a glamorous Danny La Rue style cross dresser singing a romantic song stylishly.

One of the most dangerous moments for this character arrives when the women's clothes are first discarded and Simon replaces Lola. In the Ventriloquists Dummy sequence of the 1945 film 'Dead of Night,' Michael Redgrave as the ventriloquist, Maxwell Frere finds himself being taken over by his dummy, Hugo, finally losing his identity to the dummy. Reality and imagination cease to separate in the ventriloquist's mind and in the same way we need to see flashes of Lola in Simon. To create this image takes skill and imagination in order to keep the delicate balance just right, because on this occasion we do not want either alter ego to fully take over the other. As the dual relationship with Charlie develops through 'Not My Father's Son' and 'Everybody Say Yes' and on to the bust up in Act 2, you skilfully wove the tapestry between Lola and Simon, each becoming the dominant force as required. This could have been a performance remembered solely for the 'Drag Queen' presentation, but thankfully here we had an actor not content to present such a one-dimensional portrayal.

Nicola

With no flashy solo songs or outrageous costumes to assist your cause and dialogue that invariably brings the storyline back to a sensible safe area, Nicola is the sort of character who can easily sink without trace in a flamboyant musical like this one. Quietly, but defiantly, that scenario was never going to happen with this talented player in the role of Nicola. The depth of love she felt for Charlie and her frustration that he could not see the rights of her arguments for selling the factory, rather than continuing what had to finally be a losing battle, was clearly etched on every expression and heard in every word of her dialogue. To create such a memorable character with this sort of ammunition amongst so many flamboyant characters and scenes, needed and received a performance of high quality.

Lauren

Lauren is one of those people we all would love to have as a friend, utterly reliable, who will support and back you all the way no matter how much effort that requires from herself. She is also rather old-fashioned in her social attitudes. By the late 1990's, when this story is set, the rigid class system that had been so firmly in place before the World War II, especially with regards to personal relationships, was fast disintegrating. Lauren, despite this, still believed any question of a personal relationship with Charlie was out of the question, and although often full of good ideas for the factory was always very reticent about putting them forward.

The fact that you were smitten with Charlie, but felt the best you could hope for was love from afar, came over loud and clear without you ever giving the impression that you were forcing this part of your feeling before us, or Charlie. Your inputs into discussions on the future of the factory were equally well presented. You had that one chance with 'The History of Wrong Guys' to demonstrate your ability to handle a solo number and proved to be more than just adequately up to the task.

Just a little aside, was it just by chance, or a neat idea from someone that had the two women in Charlie's life, you and Nicola, in high heeled shoes rather than the fancy boots worn by the rest of the company in the final scene? Besides the shoes you had another thing in common, the ability to create and sustain an ideal character that enhanced every scene you appeared in.

Don

Don, the big physically strong, homophobic factory worker struggling to come to grips with the fast changing world around him. You played him with that sort of blinkered attitude, here was a man who would fight to the last before he would accept women as his equal in work or sport. The man you painted would indeed find it impossible to accept someone like Lola/Simon as part of the team and the thought of taking orders from such a person would be abhorrent to him.

The tricky, 'In this Corner' number and sequence where, although victorious, you are defeated, could have become mawkish to the extent that I once saw it become down

right embarrassing. No hint of embarrassment in the way it developed, including some nicely played comedy moments, in this interpretation of the scene.

In view of the strong, bigoted factory character you created for this production, if you find auditions taking place locally for 'Made in Dagenham' you might fancy going along and giving it a whirl!

George

A nicely underplayed portrait of a man prepared to back the firm for whom he has given a lifetime's work even when they are flying straight in the face of his traditionalist views on which business path they should be following. Every time I picked you up, whether you were about to join in the discussion, or just listening and reacting to others' inputs, I never caught you out of character. The mask of George you created from the outset was firmly in place not only when part of Price & Son's management team, but when you were putting your four penneth' worth into a production number. When characters are as expertly drawn as this one they make the bulwark of a production sound and reliable.

Mr Price

This lovable, but outdated man about to be swept aside by modern changes in style and fashion, reminds me of the lyrics of the old Flannigan and Allen song 'Nice People'.

Nice people, with nice manners
But got no money at all
They've got such nice habits, they keep rabbits
But got no money at all

Their father keeps their mother
Their mother keeps their brother
And when their running short of cash
They borrow from each other, 'cause they're
Nice people, with nice manners
But got no money at all

In the course of a short single scene you painted a portrait of a man who fitted into that description perfectly.

Harry

A very successful Devon potter once took me into a little studio behind his main salesroom and showed me some beautiful, artistic, individually pieces of the potter's art. That, he said, is what I love to do, but only the occasional piece sells, and it's the signed plates and mugs that keep the business going, and give me the opportunity to indulge in my passion for designing and making these artistic pieces.

The Harry you so nicely drew had that same attitude. If you had to indulge in cheap commercialism to keep the business afloat so be it, there were plenty of others ways in which you could enjoy life, always providing there was money in the till.

Simon Senior

Simon Senior is the sort of parent you come across standing on the touchline watching a schools Rugby or Soccer game, making abusive remarks about the opposition, and/or their sons' performance in the game. The poor boy has no chance of living up to the image this unreasonable man has of his son, because in his mind the lad's performance and commitment is far below the ability he showed, or believed he showed, on the sports field at the same age. For such a man, who has to continually show his own masculinity in order to strengthen his own belief in it, to have a son who loves nothing more than demonstrating the femininity within him would indeed be an abomination. All this you have to convey in two short interjections. No room then for subtleties, a strong, no nonsense, slightly overplayed character is required, and that is what we received.

Hooligans 1 and 2

The names tell us all we need to know about the characters and their behaviour. Neatly choreographed. you fairly threw yourself into your work, in a manner that left the impression that you enjoyed your chosen profession.

Pat and Trish

I place these two ladies together because they represent two sides of a similar coin. One, Pat comes from management, the other, Trish from the factory floor, but both have the future prosperity of the works at heart, well aware that that their own future prosperity is tied up with that of the survival of Price & Son, Bootmakers. Two nice, crisply presented characters emerged, both dramatically, and when given a limited opportunity, enthusiastically in song.

Milan Stage Manager

Amongst the more senior members of YAOS there may be someone who remembers the TV advert for Mackeson Stout, in which, Bernard Miles said of Mackeson's 'It looks good, tastes good, and by golly it does you good'. You followed similar lines in that you looked good, sounded good, and fulfilled your function in a manner befitting the occasion.

Marge and Maggie

In the rarely produced Frank Loesser musical, 'How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying'. like all of the composer/lyricist of 'Guys and Dolls' shows, full of tuneful melodies, there are so many characters that pop in and out of the action with just a line or two that it is common practice for one actor to play two, three or even more characters. Marge and Maggie are faced with the same problems faced by actors with two or more roles in that show. Diving in, bang on cue, hitting the line loud and clear and then scuttling back into the background, you put in a full shift within the ensemble.

Factory Workers

It was important that this group should look and react like people who worked in the shoe factory, and as such were naturally concerned about their future employment. This you did admirably, joining in at times with some neatly presented, mimed responses to the situations you found yourselves in. Three definite pluses to the factory employees.

Young Charlie and Young Lola

We may only have the pleasure of your company for a short time but those minutes in your company are of immense importance to the show. It is during this time that the fundamental foundation of the adult Charlie and Lola's characters are established. Young Charlie showing distinct signs of not being as enamoured of the shoemaking business as his Father and Young Lola lovingly handling and attempting to wear his mother's red shoes, setup their adult selves splendidly.

Your contributions to 'The Most Beautiful Thing in the World' were equally impressive. Having used all the opportunities to create the characters fully, sadly we had to say goodbye to your talents, happy in the thought that hopefully we will see you both again onstage in the not too distant future.

The Angels

Having read the programme before 'curtain up' I then indulged, as I had when first seeing 'La Cage aux Folles' in the game of trying to pick out which 'Angel' was a Lady and which were males. I soon gave this game up to admire the dancing abilities of the group as a whole. Thinking back a long way to a schoolboy attempt to walk a few steps in my mother's high heeled 'court' shoes, my admiration grew every second as you performed some intricate dance steps in far higher 'Kinky Boots'.

Importantly there was nothing self-conscious about any of this group when performing or in repose. They looked and moved as you would expect a group of professionals trained for and with experience of their job.

Swings

Now I have to admit that I am not quite sure where this sextet of singers fitted into the production. Were you on stage, or adding to the fine vocal backing of numbers from the safety of an off stage eyrie? Either way, as I can find many notes referring both to the good quality of the chorus singing and backing of soloists, it matters not a jot where you were billeted, the result was extremely pleasing.

Thank you for the warm welcome and much appreciated interval refreshment. It was good to hear that you have overcome most, hopefully all, of the extra challenges placed before you in presenting this show, those planned for the rest of this season and on to the next.

Gerry Parker