**National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region**

Society : BROS Theatre Company

Production : Sweeney Todd

Date : Saturday, October 19th, 2019

Venue : Hampton Hill Theatre

Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

 Show Report

Once again it was a pleasure to have visited with BROS Theatre Company for their autumn 2019 production of ‘Sweeney Todd’. Thank you to Mathew Madeley for arranging my tickets and to the Front of House Team for the warm welcome on arrival.

This [musical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_theatre) [thriller](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thriller_%28genre%29) is a dark tale and certainly not the light entertainment so often seen onstage. Whilst it is a well-known show it is certainly not an easy one to stage. Sondheim’s music and lyrics are complex and it requires a strong company to successfully ‘pull off’ this wonderful show. Over the past 3 years I have greatly enjoyed a number of BROS productions and anticipated another nothing short of a resounding success here...

Congratulations must be given to Paul Turnbull, as Director, and to Suzanne Yeates, Producer, for delivering a first-class spectacle. This was a tense, and intriguing, production that drew the audience in and kept them enthralled throughout the entire performance. Simply put, it was polished and one that simply flowed – something I’ve certainly come to expect from BROS. Having the cast dress in modern clothing worked well and was an unexpected surprise. The cast was superb and it was obvious they had been meticulously rehearsed both in acting and vocals. The end result was a memorable performance and one to look back on with great satisfaction.

Nic Luker, Musical Director, and her orchestra were situated out of sight and behind the fabulous purpose-built set. Whilst this was regrettable, it nevertheless had no negative impact on the quality, or clarity, of the music which was perfectly in time with all singing. Nic had clearly ensured that both the principal and ensemble vocals had been carefully rehearsed and that diction was always first rate. I was very impressed by the blending of the band with the vocals and pleased the orchestra never overshadowed either the principal or ensemble singing.

Congratulations to Edz Barrett who, as Choreographer, ensured the visual impact of all movement was to the usual high standard expected from BROS. Whilst ‘Sweeney Todd’ does not have the level of dance as in previous shows the whole cast moved with precision and all entrances/exits were handled well. I particularly liked ‘Fogg’s Asylum’ with the gauze headscarves and awkward patient movements. This well thought-out scene was both disturbing and eerie to watch.

Sam Sugarman was outstanding as the murderous Sweeney Todd and played the role with a calm, and demented air. Sam gave his character just the right demonic quality and was in total command of his performance which was measured and well-balanced. Sweeney Todd is one of the most challenging roles to play and I thought Sam ‘nailed it’ in all respects. As well as his superb acting skills, Sam also possesses a fantastic voice which he used to great effect. ‘My Friends’ was a terrific duet with Mrs. Lovett and ‘Epiphany’ was fantastic number. ‘No Place Like London’ was palpable, however, and left the audience in no doubt as to Sweeney’s bitter hatred and lust for revenge.

Aggie Holland was a delight to watch and superbly cast as Mrs. Lovett. Aggie is an excellent actress whose characterisation was terrific and comic timing impeccably well-delivered. I loved the light and breezy way she portrayed this devious woman and brought sensitivity to a truly gruesome role and subject matter. Aggie was the perfect match for Sweeney and is also blessed with a wonderful voice which she demonstrated throughout the show. ‘The Worst Pies in London’ is, in itself, a great number but Aggie’s rendition was simply fabulous.

Jonathan Warriss-Simmons gave an excellent performance as Anthony and portrayed the love-struck young sailor with real belief. Jonathan’s acting, facial expressions and physicality were all ‘spot on’ and his interpretation of ‘Johanna’ was sung with true feeling. Georgina Skinner gave a lovely performance as the sweet and sensitive Johanna who was effectively trapped in a life of solitude. Georgina has a beautiful voice and the duet ‘Kiss Me’, with Anthony, was lovely. It was ‘Green Finch and Linnet Bird’ that really highlighted the quality of Georgina’s voice however. Jonathan and Georgina worked well together and quickly developed a believable ‘love interest’ for the audience to enjoy.

The role of Tobias Ragg is normally filled by a male actor but Milly Pickworth gave a wonderful performance here. This challenging role demands both strong character acting and a superb voice both of which Milly clearly delivered. The transformation in her character from mild-mannered apprentice to insane, broken and vengeful killer clearly gave an insight into Milly’s acting skills and ‘Pirelli’s Miracle Elixir’ demonstrated her lovely vocal skills.

Faye Brann was outstanding and totally convincing as the crazed and battered Beggar Woman. It is not easy to play ‘crazy’ or ‘drunk’ and too often a performance lacks credibility. In no uncertain terms, Faye gave a mesmerizing performance and was totally believable – both physically and mentally. It is a compliment indeed when a cameo performance makes quite such an impact as this did.

Jono Miles gave an excellent performance as Pirelli - the lavish and colourful Italian barber. Dressed flamboyantly in his red suit, Jono added light relief with style and panache. The sudden change in character was totally unexpected and the quality of both Italian and Irish accents were excellent. It was Jono’s fabulous voice, and enviable vocal range, that was truly memorable. ‘The Contest’ was simply outstanding.

Nigel Cole gave a convincing performance as Judge Turpin and displayed just the right amount of dark and sinister lechery towards Johanna that the role demanded. ‘Ladies in their Sensitivities’ and ‘Pretty Women’ highlighted Nigel’s vocal skills but it was ‘Johanna’ that wonderfully revealed his true feelings and tortured conscience. Darren Moss gave a strong performance as Beadle Bamford subtly balancing his character’s humorous nature with his darker side. Darren’s rich voice underpinned the score well and I particularly enjoyed his convincing performance on the Parlour Organ.

Congratulations to Bill Baker, Tom Cooper, Chris Nash, Jonny Buckley, Dave Shortland, Charlie Roundell-Greene, Chiara Beebe, Cath Bryant, Louise Ellard-Turnbull, Helen Geldert, Hannah-May Lucas, Gita Singham, Rachel Williams, Emma Hartnett and Chloe Anderson who provided excellent support to the principals. The ensemble tackled this production without any signs of difficulty and made everything looked effortless – which I’m certain it wasn’t. I was conscious that everyone onstage was fully immersed in the show and was delighted to hear the strong vocal harmonies and backing provided.

Set design was by Wesley Henderson Roe and this was both complicated and imaginative effectively providing the actors with three levels to perform upon and a wide variety of exits/entrances. The centre-back dark blue projection helped to create a sinister atmosphere – as did the black cloths used. The majority of the stage was left clear and provided ample space for the cast. As a result, I would like to nominate this set for **NODA’s 2020** **Shinfield Players Scenic Award and** request that a selection of 10 photos be sent to des.wilby@noda.org.uk

Set Build was handled by Patrick Troughton, Guy Chaperlin, Tom Cooper, Charlie Roundell-Green, Edz Barrett and Paul Turnbull. Well done for all your hard work here! Congratulations to Meg Hird, Stage Manager, and her crew members for ensuring everything ran like clockwork. All props were moved with minimal disruption and the end result was a performance that simply flowed.

Wardrobe was managed by Zoe Harvey-Lee and a mixture of modern-day items (Sweeney Todd) and some more colourful (Pirelli and Mrs Lovett). They were all of a good quality and greatly added to the ‘feel’ of the production. Prop were jointly managed by Jacqui Grebot and Anne Pringle. These were of a high standard and appropriate for the time period and social setting. Make-Up and Wigs were jointly managed by Louise Ellard-Turnbull and Ray Marston with everyone looking terrific onstage.

Lighting Design was by Ed Pagett and the Lighting Crew of Mike Bradbury, Tony Pike and Chris Pike ensured a consistently high level was maintained throughout with all cast members being clearly lit when required. I must make note of the rear-stage projection screen which added so much to the mood with its subtle changes in blue shade.

Sound Design and Operation was by Stuart Vaughan, assisted by Sandra Mortimer and Sian Walters who ensured everything worked well during the show with both speaking and singing being clearly audible. There were no issues with the music overshadowing actors and the stage/individual mic’s worked well indeed.

Programme Design was by PND Photography and included so much information for the audience to enjoy reading. There were some terrific photographs of rehearsals together with cast and production team biographies. Cast photos from previous shows were also terrific. The prominent NODA logo (inside back cover) was a welcome sight indeed.

Congratulations to everyone at BROS for another hugely success show and good luck in 2020. I look forward to visiting again for what, I am certain, will be more high-quality entertainment.

Des Wilby

Regional Representative

NODA London District 3