

BROS Theatre Company

MY FAIR LADY • JANUARY 1996 • RICHMOND THEATRE

REVIEW • MIDDLESEX CHRONICLE

My Fair Lady is probably the last line in true operettas, and in many ways is something of an anachronism, being an exact contemporary of West Side Story. For that reason it has never been a favourite show of mine, but last week Barnes and Richmond Operatic Society achieved something I thought was well-nigh impossible; they caused me to enjoy a production of it.

The secret of the success lay, I think, in playing down the sentimental side of the show, allowing much of the original dialogue to keep the show buoyant.

For this credit must go to the directing team of Robert Salter & Alison Titchmarsh who between them managed to minimise the stop-start effect that can so easily bedevil the show in which the musical numbers tend to hold up the action rather than move it on. In this they were aided and abetted by the excellent designs of Jens Cole and the sumptuous costumes of Kristin Blunt as well as the perceptive musical direction of Carl Smith.

Janet Simpson's Eliza had real bite in 'Just You Wait' and sense of deep betrayal in 'Without You', though I was irritated by her gabbling of the lines in the opening scenes.

Despite having been written for Rex Harrison to deliver in speech-song, I have always been more convinced by a performance in which the role is genuinely sung. Terry Saunders did that, with every word distinct and full and rich tone.

Steve Alais made a good stab at Doolittle, pulling off his two big numbers as to the manner born, while Edward Jeffroy was an excellent Pickering.

Bryan Cardus was a very personable Freddy Eynsford-Hill and sang 'On the Street Where You Live' quite beautifully. Cynthia Carss won a justifiable ovation for her portrayal of Mrs Higgins.

There were some fine performances in smaller roles, particularly from Angela Sturgeon as Mrs Pearce and Peter Read as Zoltan Karpathy.

And how all the company danced! From the exultant trio of 'The Rain in Spain' to the glorious uproar of 'I'm Getting Married in the Morning'. The impetus never flagged.

This was a production to remember.