

BILLY ELLIOT - THE MUSICAL - BMYP - REDGRAVE THEATRE – MARCH 2011

Director/Choreographer - Vicki Klein Musical director - Kerrie Duce

Where to start - this was breathtaking, it took my breath away with all the energy and enthusiasm coming from this talented cast. This production has the WOW factor and deserved the standing ovation at the end. I was worn out with just watching. This show must be a choreographer's nightmare and dream and Vicki and Tina excelled themselves - from the smallest ballerina to at the end even Grandma! This was non stop fun. And to achieve such a high standard in only 8 weeks - congratulations

SETTING

The show started with a gauze with a news cast playing, setting the scene to the 1980's and the miners strike, and when the gauze drew back we were immediately in a northern town, the muted colours gave just the right impression. Well done to scenery designer Alison Faulkner The scene changes were handled smoothly and efficiently by Rick Hanratty and his crew and although they were done in full view it never detracted from the action onstage - Congratulations

COSTUMES

The costumes were in period and set the scenes well, well done to Jane Black. Although I've never had a Barbie doll myself the costumes for these were excellent - well done to Jacquie Bell and Jane Huntbach

LIGHTING

The stage and the actors were always well lit, although there were a few dark patches at times. Good use was made of the effects but the smoke machine did over do it a little in the scene with Billy and his older self, covering the stage so that "Billy" disappeared from view a couple of times

MUSIC

The band was excellent, playing at just the right levels, never drowning the singers – Congratulations to all of you and to Musical Director Kerrie Duce

SOUND

This was again excellent; you could hear every spoken word and song, always at the right levels

CHOREOGRAPHY

The choreography was excellent, and the cast were really enjoying themselves, you all must have worked so hard to achieve this high standard of excellence in only 8 weeks. Congratulations to Vicki and Tina you must be really proud of the cast

HAIR AND MAKE UP

The hair styles looked just right and the make up was natural looking – well done to Angela and Daniela

PROPS

Sheri and her team Sheila and Annette made sure that all the props were on hand as needed and in period – well done

THE CAST

BILLY ELLIOT (Ben Richer)

This was a superb performance by Ben, his spoken voice was always clear, his accent never wavered throughout the show and his dancing was excellent. This was a professional and natural actor, always in character and it was obvious from the sparkle in his eyes and the enthusiasm he showed that he was enjoying himself and because of this the audience were with him from the moment he stepped on stage to the breathtaking ending – From the poignant moment with Grandma, to his struggle to become a dancer against all odds, this was an outstanding performance
Congratulations Ben a star in the making

MICHEAL CAFFREY (Rhys Batten)

This was another strong performance, natural and relaxed whilst on stage, Michael is a good dancer with good rhythm and a nice singing voice – the comedy moments between him and Billy were handled with perfect timing. The reactions between the two of them in their dialogues, even in the sensitive moments was natural and believable
This is another excellent actor

DEBBIE WILKINSON (Georgie King)

A lovely cameo part, clear diction and just the right amount of “young girl” attitude, good dancing and natural rhythm – well done

MRS WILKINSON (Emilie Smith)

Having last seen Emilie in the part of “Miranda” this was a more mature and sensitive performance, each time Emilie was on stage she took control, whether she was singing dancing or speaking she was always the character. This is an actress who has a natural talent, whether it was her comedy moments with “camp” Mr Brathwaite, or trying to teach young girls to be ballet dancers or even the sensitive moments with Billy, she was who she was “Mrs. Wilkinson” – Congratulations

JACKIE ELLIOT (Euan Shanahan)

The maturity shown in this performance, made you forget that you were watching “young Euan” this was Jackie Elliott father and a miner. A really strong characterization, he struggled with the strike, the father wanting his lad to be a “lad” but in the end ably supporting him in his dream and becoming the proud father. Euan too had his sensitive moment with the singing of the Folk Song, and the torment he is suffering at the same time. Never once did he lose his accent – well done on (and I’m afraid I’m going to use the word again) an excellent performance

TONY (Aaron Holmes)

A good performance, blending in with the rest of the family, again we had a good speaking voice, and good emotion well acted throughout

GRANDMA (Jess Carter)

To play someone much older than yourself, there is always the danger of going over the top, and making that person a caricature. But Jess played Grandma brilliantly, just the right amount of forgetfulness, and moments of sensitivity, her reaction to the rest of the family was well handled; as was her interaction with Billy. Jess has a good singing voice not to mention her excellent dancing – this was a good strong and well acted performance – well done

MR BRAITHWAITE (Mike Howie)

A good camp over the top performance, I loved the voice and the dancing, and when Mike did the splits, I'm sure there were many in the audience who winced as he went down. A natural actor, using the stage well and a good comedy actor

GEORGE (Robin Willingham)

Good accent, a natural performance, his manner was right and he used the stage well
A good team player, blending in and interacting with his fellow actors – well done

DEAD MUM (Helen James)

This part demanded sensitivity and Helen gave us just that. This was a moving portrayal and her interaction with Billy was handled beautifully, right up to the moment when he handed her the letter and she realized that it was time for her to move on – a good strong speaking voice -congratulations

BILLY'S OLDER SELF (Jack Cutler)

Although we only see Jack dancing he has a natural rhythm in his movement and his scene with Billy was superbly handled, despite the amount of smoke on stage! – Well done

BIG DAVEY (Mark Gollop)

A strong performance, Mark carried his part well, the accent did not drop, and he has a good clear voice, working well as part of the team, whether singing or dancing

CLIPBOARD WOMAN (Charlotte Bell)

A good characterization of that certain type of person, Charlotte carried the clip board as if she had done it all her life. Clear diction and just the right accent –well done

POSH DAD (James Goldsworthy)

There are no small parts, only small actors and every one in a production is essential to the whole, this was “a posh parent” the accent was so BBC and he looked relaxed on stage

POSH BOY (Daniel Comley)

The spoilt child, it was obvious the divide between him and Billy Elliot, a good performance and again a lovely upper English accent

SCAB (Simon Harris)

A man of few words but they were delivered well and he worked as part of the team and keeping in character throughout

LESLEY (Lily Huntbach)

Last seen as a “Stewardess” this was quite a change, but Lily handled the part well and has a natural relaxed stage presence

PANELISTS (Emily Cook : Emily Kelly : Sam Little)

Although they had very little dialogue there was shades of “Simon Cowell and his cronies” These were the panelists that every one who has to audition for a part dreads, strict and severe, Emily Cook, Emily Kelly and Sam Little portrayed these characters perfectly – well done

PIT SUPERVISOR (Ollie Harman)

Another man of few words, but Ollie made them count, a clear speaking voice and a good strong accent – well done

BALLET GIRLS

Put little girls in ballet skirts, especially very young ones and you don’t have to do anything else; the audience will go “Aaah” even if they couldn’t dance. But here we had ten real ballet dancers; they were one of the highlights of the show. They danced beautifully and all had the right attitude towards Mrs. Wilkinson, and they moved with ease and grace – congratulations

BOXERS

Five young lads learning to box, you all moved well and used the stage well, good voices and reactions to each other and Billy. (When you look at it there is a fine line between boxing and ballet!) You all worked together as part of a team, keeping in character – well done

MINERS

These were strong men, who weren’t afraid to speak out; they kept up the characters they were playing and were believable in their acting – well done

WOMEN

You were always in character, holding the accents well, and working well with each other and the other actors, we felt your pain at the strike, but you also showed your resolve in supporting the men-folk, this was team work at its best. Good voices and dancing. – Congratulations

BARBIE DOLLS

I'm sure it must be every young girls dream to be a "Barbie Doll" and here we had real live ones. (Which must be every young man's dream?) They were well costumed and when they came to life and danced, it was well choreographed and their routine was perfectly danced – well done

RIOT POLICE

I note that these are not mentioned in the programme, but they looked right and acted well together with just the right amount of aggression towards the miners. Their tutus really set off the uniforms and they danced well together. So well done, just the right "stamp" of authority

There were no weak links in this musical; you forgot you were watching a youth group because of the maturity they brought to playing the adults. Everyone played their part and throughout the show kept up not only their accents, their parts but their energy and enthusiasm and worked as one big team, for the cast there was no star, they were all stars.

Congratulations to Vicki and her cast and crew, this must have been hard work, but it was obviously worth it, the audience enjoyed it and showed their appreciation with a standing ovation. As always Vicki makes her cast work hard and as always they achieve that 120%. It is so nice to see young people enjoying acting, singing and dancing as this group do, and of course it's nice to see the smiling faces on stage So congratulations once again to all of you for an excellent show

Thank you for an entertaining evening, and for inviting me once again, after seeing the last production, I was wondering if you could excel that and you did. I wait to see what marvels you can pull out of the hat for your next production. Thank you also for your kind hospitality Front of House - you always make me feel welcome

Tony Winstone
NODA Representative – District 13