



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: BMYP

Name of Production: Elf – The Musical

Venue: Redgrave Theatre, Clifton

Date: 20th November 2019

Presentation

Set played an important part in this production. The initial curtains parted to such a blast of festive colour: the wonderful 'stockinged' legs of elves straddled both sides of the stage; playing area was festooned with Christmas tree branches, striped candy canes and stars. Additional props had been so well thought through, so that a workshop replete with colourful toys was well established. Central workstation blocks were then cleverly translated into flat, office space and shop. The monochrome decor of Walter's flat really contrasted with the Christmas colours and gave an air of affluence. Drawn, clinical blinds set the tone for both flat and office. Macy's stations were breathtakingly – and so quickly – decorated with Christmas garlands, strongly evoking the abundance of an American Christmas store. Attractive angel structures evoked the Rockefeller decorations and Santa's sleigh was very well constructed and decorated. Throughout, back projection enhanced both mood and storyline. This was particularly evident as Emily and Michael witnessed the sleigh taking off in the background – a real 'oooo' moment!

Lighting added such atmosphere. The bright, warm interiors of flat and shop contrasted beautifully with the blue tones for exterior, winter scenes. Snowball projections added extra texture to the latter. Backdrop bulbs gave real impact to the Christmas workshop and Macy's and the effect of Santa's lit-up ledger was most effective.

Costumes complemented the lovely settings. There was such detail and variety here – no elf or office worker was exactly the same; the former were rightly clad in red and green but all with differing features and patterns. The 50's feel of the girls' dresses at the office was appropriate; the brightness of their knee length skirts complemented the patterned lapels of the boys' suits. We were always reminded that this was a Christmas fairy tale. Plain suits and long coats gave visual impact to the street scenes; additional accessories – hats, mufflers and bags – were always in keeping and suited each character. Addition of fur trims for the ice rink added texture to this atmospheric scene and a wonderful array of winter wonderland blue and white for all the cast in the finale completed this very attractive aspect of the production. Alice Bands and curls for the office girls were appropriate – Deb's extravagant 'updo' very striking too. I wasn't sure about Jovie's hairpiece – it seemed to detract from the modern characterisation?

Overall, the presentation of this show was fun, evocative and so very lovely to look at!

Direction

The colourful and warm welcome by elves selling candy canes set the tone for a family-friendly and exuberant start to the festive season. Elf is a very light production in terms of story, characterisation and musicality. It relies on a commitment to the idea of spreading some Christmas magic. And this you did very well.

Players were engaged from the onset. The opening scene of busy elves drew us into Santa's workshop; effective, stylised movements here, although focus of the working elves did waver a little: consistent attention on Elf and Charlie would have enhanced this opening even more. Dialogue between Charlie and Shawanda was excellent – they timed both delivery and physical responses really effectively. And I do commend the 'knee-walking!' First entrance of Buddy created just the right impact, as he filled the stage with his tall stature and such pliable facial play. His excellent shaping of dialogue set the tone for a lib' that was well delivered by all the cast. Consistent and clear accents and clarity of text ensured that pace never dipped during the speaking. Pace was also helped by swift and impactful scene changes, often assisted by the hard working ensemble. Very secure performances from all the leads really carried the show. Deb led her crew of secretaries with such clarity and the requisite humour; the really lovely rapport between Emily and Michael captured the sadness of a lonely wife and son: this could so easily have been trite, but these young players communicated an unforced and impactful tenderness here. Feisty and modern Jovie worked really well too.

Movement around the stage added to the magic; the lovely opening scenes in New York when players were so engaged, created a busy cityscape. Blocking of scene in Macy's gave the players such purpose - the introduction of younger children here really contributed to the spirit of the show. Ice Rink scene is challenging, but you just about carried us through with some brave movement on wheels and again some focused bystanders, holding coffee and cups and helping us believe in the spirit of the scene.

Musical Direction

Cast worked well with what I presume was a taped backing. There was only one occasion when I was aware of faltering at the start of a number – it is very challenging to sing without a ‘present’ MD. If I am honest I find the numbers in this show somewhat forgettable; however your committed cast gave their heart to the songs and we were captivated by their infectious enthusiasm. There isn’t really a big ensemble number in Elf – but I did find myself humming ‘A Christmas Song’ on my way home; singers really captured the tone of this simple number, which gently reminds us of the spirit of the season. Capable performances from all the leads; Buddy sustained his character admirably during his well-projected numbers; his vocal pitch contrasting so beautifully with that of his father. Jovie’s soulful voice gave such grit to ‘Never Fall in Love.’ But the showstoppers for me were the two numbers between mother and son, when these players found such heart and purpose as they communicated their journey towards ‘believing’

Choreography

This was a very inclusive aspect of the show; every player was involved in some kind of movement. The humorous line of fake Santas delivered such a fun number, drawing on can-can and Russian dance, all of which communicated their frustration so very well. Lines of dancers in front of scene changes gave various members of the ensemble their ‘moment’ and the whole cast was involved in a big finale tap number. It was evident that all the cast were being given the opportunity to develop this performance discipline, and this is very commendable. Some dance leads executed a busy tap number in the first Act. Timing was a little lost at one point, but energy was sustained throughout. Some very strong lines in the office numbers; this group of dance leads really sustained audience contact and focus and brought life to these songs. Effective use of dance props too, including note books and tinsel!

Playing

Santa

Your relaxed initial entrance, with some effective impro’ as you walked in, set the tone for this warm production. Lovely movement to the red chair, you delivered the lines with an amiable authority - it was warm but never twee.

Buddy

You were made for this part! Your height, big eyes and sensitive, focussed performance enabled you to present the child at the heart of this character so well. Movements were rightly ‘awkward’, allowing you to show the person who didn’t really belong anywhere. Facial response was so strong – you responded well to other characters and also pointed your response beautifully for the audience. This was often very humorous – for instance as you wove between the singers in ‘In The Way’. Unaffected singing vocal enabled you to

sustain this character beautifully in your solos; You captured the requisite naivety at the heart of this performance – but also found some integrity in your relationship with Jovie: argument was excellently timed. The audience fell in love with you – and rightly so.

Charlie

A clear and confident leader of the Elves, you delivered your lines with assurance. Strong connection with Shawanda enhanced this performance.

Shawanda

A small role – but you made it a memorable one, shaping your dialogue effectively and bringing a very strong focus to both vocal and physical performance.

Samantha

You are a charismatic performer and brought such energy to the dance numbers. Lib' was delivered clearly and with strong intention.

Walter

You older physical appearance – effective make-up – was matched by a deeper voice and more mature stance, so that we believed in the 'Father.' Work stress was clearly communicated and your final change of perspective projected clearly. Your well-pitched singing vocal contrasted effectively with your son's!

Deb

A very well-defined characterisation; tight diction and a strong physicality enabled you to present the classic secretary. Well-modulated delivery of dialogue was matched by fluid and humorous physicality – you used those great glasses so very well!

Emily Hobbs

A really mature performance, capturing both your frustration and sadness at your husband's obsession with work. Timing in both lib' and song was excellent and you managed to find the depth in this character as she bonded with her son.

Michael Hobbs

A very memorable performance from this young player. You are so at ease on stage and respond effortlessly to the action around you. Very well-shaped delivery of lib' was matched by a well-pitched and attractive singing vocal. You brought real heart to this production.

Jovie

You presented a very modern love interest, giving an effective edge to this character. Dialogue was energetic and very well timed; you are a very relaxed player but do ensure that breath support sustains energy right to the end of every phrase in the lib'. You gave credibility to your relationship with Buddy, despite the very light plot! This enabled you to give a very strong performance of 'Never Fall..', when your beautifully resonant and brilliantly projected vocal gave us such a vivid picture of your feelings.

Mr. Greenway

Your sense of stress and frustration shone through consistently; watch punctuation to sustain accurate phrasing. Effective use of hands in pockets to capture the stance of the older man.

Charlotte Denon

Strong stance enabled you to capture the professional; good stab at the accent – again just sustain breath support so clarity is maintained.

Ensemble

The rest of the cast contributed so much to the energy and warmth of this production. There was such a commitment to the festive message and players worked well together to present strong groupings and also some impactful cameos. Macy's Assistant gave a strong opening to this number (following the authoritative Manager) and Chloe provided excellent support in the dancing scenes: a very reactive, vibrant player.

Thank you very much for such an enjoyable evening and your hospitality.

A lovely start to the Christmas Season!