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**Society** : St Albans Musical Theatre Company  
**Production** : My Fair Lady  
**Date** : Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019  
**Venue** : Alban Arena  
**Report by** : Michael Monk

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**Show Report**

A very warm welcome to NODA London from the East region and thanks for kindly inviting me to review your autumn production of 'My Fair Lady'. I have personally had the pleasure of performing, Directing and choreographing with SAMTC in the past and know they set high standards for all their productions and I am so pleased their standards haven't dropped, in fact they are getting better. There are three words that sum up this production for me, 'Stunning', 'Scintillating' and finally 'Superb'. I'm only sorry my wife Gilli, who usually accompanies me to all the musicals I review, could not be witness to such a wonderful evening. From the opening notes of the overture to the emotional 'I've Grown Accustomed to her Face' SAMTC hit the mark time after time.

Director – JULIA RUFY is to be congratulated on delivering and staging a superb and stylish production, lavish and stunning all at the same time. Excellent choice for moving the interval where you did. Julia's experience and enthusiasm for musical theatre is a joy to behold for audiences around and should not be missed. The whole company gave such energy and enthusiasm throughout their performances. If I had one very small criticism, I felt a slightly larger ensemble would have filled the huge Alban arena stage a lot better as the set was quite sparse at times. Having said that, it was a thoroughly enjoyable theatre experience from this classic Lerner & Loewe musical.

Musical Direction, in the expert hands of PHILIP JOSLIN, with an excellent and well balanced 13-piece orchestra only enhanced the production more. Principal & Company singing was exemplary, with clear diction and some beautiful harmonies coming through. Considering with a much smaller ensemble than usual, they truly gave it some welly! I also particularly enjoyed the lovely harmony singing from the Quartet DAVID CLARKE, CHARLIE HARDEN, ROBIN LANE and ZODIAC WILLOUGHBY-O'NEILL and also the Servants Chorus ANDREA ADLAM, DANIELLE AGAR, KAREN THORP, ROBIN LANE & MICHAEL READMAN.

Choreographer – GAYLE BRYANS - Terrific choreography throughout the whole show, everyone excelled in playing their parts with high energy and enthusiasm. Highlights for me were the dance break in 'Lovely', 'Get Me to the Church' and the gorgeous Ballroom dance. Bravo Gayle!

Stage Management – CHRIS ROOK assisted by ANNETTE ADKINS, JACK MALIN and ANYA BOUCHER with Crew TERRY CATCHPOLE, MELANIE THURLOW, COLIN ADLAM, BEN PALMER, JASON POWER, DAVID HAWES, JAMIE ROSS, MARK WIGGINS, HENRIETTA WINGATE-MARTIN, ANDREA CAMPUSANO all contributing to the smooth and efficient running of the show.

Props – DAVID HALSHAW and JESSIE SMITH – All props and furniture were well sourced and appropriate for the period. In Hindsight, perhaps a three-seater sofa, for the study scenes, would have helped fill the stage a little more with such a big stage. The attention to detail in the study was excellent, in particular the beautiful Dictaphone's.

Costumes – supplied by DRESS CIRCLE and well managed by ROSEMARY O'TOOLE, TRISH O'TOOLE and MAGGIE BRADBURN with team. The lovely traditional black and white themed 'Ascot Gavotte' was delightful, only thing missing were gloves for the gentlemen.

Wigs – supplied by SHEPERTON WIG COMPANY and managed very well by TRISH O'TOOLE – The Ladies looked beautiful and all accessories helped create the stylish period look.

Sound – supplied by SEVENTH WAVE - All on cue and the balance between orchestra pit and performer was executed very well indeed.

Lighting – supplied by THE ALBAN ARENA and operated by LEWIS COVEY-CRUMP with Follow Spot Operators VICTORIA BEDDOES, BRIAN CARROLL and NATASHA BAKER - All lighting cues were very well executed with good area and mood lighting giving the right ambience throughout. At tonight's performance it was a shame that a FOH light motor got noisily stuck for half of Act 2 which was rather distracting.

Eliza Doolittle – NICOLA MARTINUS-SMITH, as the Covent Garden flower seller, delivered a performance that could easily have been seen today on the west end stage. Nicola captured Eliza's spirit, with every beautiful top note, perfectly and carried the audience along on her transformation into a society lady. Your rendition of 'I Could Have Danced All Night' had the hairs on the back of my neck standing on end. Beautiful! Your interaction, especially with Higgins and also Colonel Pickering were exemplary. Many Congratulations Nicola.

Henry Higgins – MATTHEW GREGORY'S performance as the egotistical phonetics professor was charismatic, confident and completely believable in a role in which he added his own subtle and exuberant characterisation. Your interaction and relationship with Eliza, although annoying, was exceptional and must have been a joy to play against. Perfect balance of the spoken word and vocal for each of your numbers. Superb all-round performance. Congratulations Matthew!

Colonel Pickering – TONY BRADBURN – Delightful performance from start to finish. Your comedy timing both musical and facial expressions were a joy. Your concern for Eliza was eclipsed momentarily by the joy of success at the ball but always rang true.

Alfred Doolittle – BEN FRICKE – A confident and very reliable performance. It was refreshingly restrained, even underplayed, but you hit the right note bringing out the selfishness of the character which lurks beneath all the humour. You were ably supported by Harry - HOWARD PENNING and Jamie – JAMES RUSSELL during the two high energy numbers 'With A little Bit of Luck' and 'Get Me to The Church on Time'.

Freddy Emsford-Hill – OLIVER SUTTON-IZZARD – Lovely performance of the drippy character Freddy which was sweet and charming. This was particularly evident in the beautiful number 'On the Street Where You Live' where you captured the innocence of the Character without being too sentimental. Lovely tone of voice and excellent story telling.

Mrs Higgins – SUSAN AKROYD - Brought class and style to this gem of the lovely cameo role of Mrs Higgins. Dressed impeccably! Delivered some delicious comedy one liners with great timing and aplomb. Bravo Susan!

Mrs Eynsford-Hill – KATHERINE BARRY – Delightful performance in this small supporting role as Freddy's mother. The afternoon tea scene at Ascot was a joy with lovely facial expressions during Eliza's speeches.

Mrs Pearce – CHARLOTTE FERIN – A cosy character looking after the household. Although a small role, Charlotte managed to show sympathetic affection beautifully throughout Eliza's learning ordeal.

Zoltan Karpathy – MATT CLOTHIER - A small but confident performance in the ballroom scene. Maintained the accent with ease.

A delightful new concept for the programme produced by GRAHAM BLUNDELL, ELISE BETTS and ADITI SAWJANI. Simplistic but still very informative. Please do consider entering it into our annual Poster and programme competition which runs from 1<sup>st</sup> Jan – 31<sup>st</sup> December each year . More details can be found on the NODA website.

I look forward to your next production Saturday Night Fever the Musical next spring.

Thank you once again for your very kind welcome and hospitality and many congratulations again on a terrific production.

Best wishes

Michael Monk  
Regional Representative  
NODA London District 10 (Musicals)

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