

THE PRINCE GEORGE CITIZEN

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LOCAL NEWS

Les Miserables is a joy

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Judy Russell's Les Miserables is so good, I don't know where to start praising it.

She must really love this town, because Russell's production of Les Mis is a gift to the community. It's not a pretty present, wrapped up in a little pink bow. This is a gift that comes with fist-clenching emotion, hitching intakes of gasping breath and gushes of head-bowing despair.

The whole package is a brilliant depiction of the strife of life, the struggles of humanity, and the little beams of light that carry hope to people's hearts, if only briefly.

From the lighting, the set, the costumes, the full-on power of an orchestra along with the cast and crew, this production rises to a professional level.

There is not a weak link in the whole cast.

Damian Dorschner is the Bishop of Digne and early in the show, he places his hand upon Jean Valjean's faces, brilliantly played by Andy Beesley. Dorschner tells Beesley to take the silver he stole to start an honest life and my eyes filled with tears. It was an incredibly intimate exchange that took courage and conviction to pull off and that was just the beginning.

The classic lighting effect where an actor walks into a spotlight and as they continue their trek the spotlight illuminates the way was used in Les Mis when Fantine was singing about her plight in life. It was a poignant portrayal of hope and despair wrapped together in a frail package played by Catherine McCarthy. She was an excellent choice for the role, with her expressive face and powerful voice, that translates all her feelings clearly.

There are so many incredible performances during the show, I can't mention them all but I do have to gush about the unbelievable talent of Beesley.

Not only did the man undergo a lifestyle change and lost more than 70 pounds for this show, his whole depiction of Jean Valjean engaged the entire audience throughout.

The microphones the actors use are placed very close to their mouths and when Beesley is so emotionally engaged that his breath catches in hitching gasps before his first note is even sung, it is spellbinding for the audience to watch. You can't help but feel his pain, you can't help but identify with his character who struggles with the bitterness of being enslaved for 19 years for stealing bread to save his nephew from starvation, the

revenge he is tempted to seek on his captors, the wish to just live a simple life, and the hope of happily ever after -- if not for him, for those closest to him.

My undoing came at the hands, once again, of Beesley. As he sang Bring Him Home, I could not wipe the tears off my face fast enough. He is a raw performer that holds nothing back. His voice is so blatantly filled with overwhelming emotion, it was a privilege to watch.

Mathew Chiappetta plays Javert, the policeman who makes it his life-long mission to chase after Valjean after he breaks parole. Chiappetta is a graduate of the renown St. Michael's Choir School in Toronto and it certainly shows in his talent as he portrays this driven character.

Gary Chappel, most recently remembered as Scrooge in December's A Christmas Carol, was so entertaining as Thenardier, the inn keeper. His partner in crime, Robin Norman as Madame Thenardier, as well as being the musical director and assistant director, also gave an incredible performance, playing off Chappel's comedic timing and giving as good as she got.

Little Cosette, played by Laura Buchanan, 11, was so engaging. Her completely convincing performance adding to the rock-solid foundation Les Mis was built on.

Nigel McInnis played Marius, the love interest of the all-grown up Cosette, played by Sarah Gyorfi.

McInnis played the role with strength, while Gyorfi was stunning as the innocent young woman who fell madly in love at first sight.

Kelsey Wheatley really has it all going on as she played Eponine, a multi-dimensional character conflicted in her love and devotion to Marius. Wheatley is a compelling young woman, who draws the eye with her stellar musical theatre skills.

Jon Russell played Enjolras with an incredible stage presence. His vocal skills and effective body language tell the story of his convictions.

With great sets and costumes, lighting, sound and music, performers and crew, this really is the production to see.

The show goes until August 3. Tickets for Les Miserables are at Studio 2880 by calling 250-563-2880.

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