

## REVIEW: Les Miserables is wonderful



By Prince George Free Press

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It gave me goosebumps, it made me cry.

Judy Russell's production of Boublil and Schonberg's *Les Miserables* is an absolutely brilliant and stunning musical with superb cast, costumes, set, lights and sound effects. Thanks, Bill Russell. Great job, conductor Kevin Zakresky and Les Mis orchestra with memorable music.

Every actor/singer on stage at the Prince George Playhouse, whether in lead, duo or supportive roles or in cameo or chorus – gave 100 per cent opening night Tuesday. Bravo. Bravo. Bravo.

By far, this local amateur production is for me, the best ever musical theatre I have seen anywhere (including London, England) on any stage. Russell didn't just nab the sought-after Les Mis rights, she earned them with a build-up of musical theatre successes over the years.

Alex Murray got it right when he said this is the "best cast ever assembled." I have to agree. Forgive me if space allows me to highlight only a few of the very exceptional performances and only some of the sensational scenes.

Andy Beesley as Jean Valjean dug deep to pull heartfelt emotion, reportedly from his own life's journey [CBC interview with Wil Fundal], for his portrayal of paroled convict, prisoner 24601. Soaring solos, notably *Who Am I?* and *Bring Him Home*, show the wide range not just of Beesley's amazing vocals but of his emotions. His performance is a highlight, for sure.

Also I loved the Lovely Ladies and the Beggar Women choruses.

Teaming together Robin Norman and Gary Chappel as innkeepers Monsieur and Madame Tenardier with their enormous vocal and comedic talents is pure magic. They are delightful together on stage and their zany roles provide some comedic relief that probably kept us from depleting the facial tissue supply.

Brett Dobson as a street urchin and revolutionary hero Gavroche has great stage presence for a lad so young. He's a great talent in the making and an actor who, even when the focus is elsewhere, remembers to keep in character.

Nigel McInnis is well cast as Marius, the gentleman revolutionist with whom two women (Eponine and Jean Valjean's adopted daughter Cosette) fall in love. His vocals easily carry the role but he also packs a lot of emotion into his time onstage.

Damian Dorschner, Curtis Abriel, Dwight Wolfe and Beverley Smith also gave top notch performances. Kelsey Wheatley brought real passion to the role of Eponine with her solo spot, *On My Own*.

I loved Catherine McCarthy as Fantine, Cosette's mother. She's enchanting in any role – Nonsense or The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee. But in this dramatic role, she shines. Her *I Dreamed a Dream* brought tears to my eyes.

Got to say though, so did the vocals of Beesley, Sarah Gyorfí (as grown up Cosette) ...and Jon Russell as Enjolras as he rallied the "boys" with *ABC Cafe/Red and Black*. Mathew Chiappetta gave an outstanding musical theatre debut as Inspector Javert, the policeman who makes life miserable – more miserable – for Valjean.

Chiappetta has a very pure and powerful operatic voice. When he sang a riveting rendition of *Stars*, I actually got goosebumps.

Well, actually I spent most of the evening, as mentioned, either on the verge of crying or marveling at all this talent on one stage. I was saved from crying more only by the need to take photos for the *Free Press*.

So thanks for that, Judy and the Les Mis cast. There's nothing like a good cry to make you feel better. Job well done.

Judy Russell presents a new production of Boubilil and Schonberg's *Les Miserables* at Prince George Playhouse through August 3. Tickets for the musical, based on a novel by Victor Hugo, are available from Studio 2880.

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