Fallbrook Players at the Mission Theatre

Les Miserables: A Theatrical Review

Perhaps the best overall production I have seen yet this year, The Fallbrook Players have a total hit with their rendition of 'Les Miserables' at the Mission Theatre in Fallbrook, CA. Masterfully directed by Stephen Knoll-Gentry and produced by Jane Stimmel, the Fallbrook Players not only understand the depth of this magnificent story, but have an unbelievable amount of respect for the message of undying love and selflessness.

As many of my readers know, I spent a season of time on stage portraying Jean Valjean, and as a result one might think that I would give special favor to this production regardless of where it is presented, but this could not be more incorrect. As a person with a massive passion for this production as well as the book 'Les Miserables by Victor Hugo,' I am actually far more critical of the work every time I see it. I have seen great productions of this show, and I have seen truly awful productions as well. Know this 'Les Miserables' lovers, this is a production that is well worth your time and money.

The Fallbrook Players are an all youth theatre league, and placing an "A" on any youth production is something that this reviewer has rarely ever done. The difference is simple; the show's producer told me that the majority of the performers took the required time to read Victor Hugo's classic tale before they were involved in the show itself. This tells me that not only do they believe that this project deserved the due respect required to actually read this amazing novel, but also that those in charge of the Fallbrook Players genuinely care about the educational value of being involved in a project this extensive for the performer.

Allow me to send a word of wisdom to those directors and producers I know that read my reviews on a regular basis: keep your eyes on some key names in the future. There are many quality young people in this program, but, like with all programs, there are also a few stand-out performers that should be on larger stages, and certainly will be if they desire it greatly enough. Perhaps the strongest of these names is Matthew Malecki who portrays the role of Inspector Javert. Matthew is an eighteen-year-old senior at Vista Murrieta High School with a fairly large list of credits for his young age. This young man has the skills to take

Hollywood by storm, and I for one will be watching his career. For those of my readers who know my work as a director, take this statement to heart, this is a young man I would be only too happy to cast in a production of mine. For those of you who do not know my work, trust me, I would not say something like this half-heartedly.

Though there are no bad performers in this production, there are a few other young people that I would very much like to spotlight, an amazing fifteen-year-old named Heather Banks who portrays Eponine; Marshall Elstad who portrays a very believable Thenardier, Quinton Walker who offers a powerfully convincing Enjolras; Reed Lievers offering a Broadway believable Gavroche; and a strong Bamatabois offered by a mystifying young actor named Scott Greenstone. With each of these young people, the audience is captured by their respect and dedication to the role they portray, the unbelievable abilities they have already learned as a performer, and other than perhaps their youthful looks, the overall impression of them as professional actors.

Also on stage are some other amazing performers who are on their way to real success. Perhaps they have not yet mastered the vocal maturity of some of their peers, but this is absolutely no reason not to see them for what they are, powerful young actors that are not to be overlooked. Colin Arnold offers a highly convincing Jean Valjean; Sarah Slaven a powerful Fantine; Caitlin Vaccine a magnificent Madame Thenardier; and Austin Wright a delightfully articulate Marius.

The production opens with the statement, "So long as ignorance and poverty exist on earth, stories of the nature of 'Les Miserables' cannot fail to be of use." This is a powerful statement to say the very least, and one that the producers and directors of this production have taken to heart. There is no doubt in my mind that the young people in this production, as well as all who give their work and dedication it's just reward, will forever be changed for the better. A nearly full house the day this reviewer attended, there were more than a few who were having problems controlling their emotions by the end of the production - many tears shed, proving not only the power of the story, but also masterful dedication of its cast and crew.

All in all this production, from the exceptional quality of acting to the dedication and excellence in direction and production, to the strong and flawless live musical orchestration offered by a surprising small ensemble (viewable by the audience at all times), is totally worth the drive time. The Mission Theatre is located at 231

Main Ave in Fallbrook, CA 92028, just north of San Diego and south of Lake Ellsinore off the 15 Freeway. Fallbrook is a delightful little town offering a quintessential yesteryear feel with shops and storefronts that look like something from the 1920's. There is no actual parking lot for the theatre, but plenty of close by street parking freely available. The converted movie theatre offers an elegant foyer with clean restrooms, and comfortable seating for all. Tickets can be purchased at the box office window the day of the performance, or can be ordered on line by logging onto www.FallbrookPlayers.com or www.Tix.com

If you're willing to drive a short distance, and if you see no other live theatrical production for the rest of the year, see 'Les Miserables' by the Fallbrook Players. You will not be sorry that you did. But do not waste time, the production closes on October 3, 2010. My extreme gratitude to each and every one of those involved with this amazing production, you have proven to me, once again, that true quality in theater does not demand only seasoned performers or the major theaters of note. I review ten to fifteen productions every month, and I can honestly tell you that this production is the highest quality and most powerful I have encountered so far this year. Well Done!

Randall Gray

Theatrical Critic

Randall Gray is a veteran of both film and stage, with credits including published author, playwright, director, producer, and actor, with over twenty years in the world of professional live theatrical programming as well as vocal recording and performance, and video production.