



Nancy Duchaine (Eliza Doolittle)

## My Fair Lady delivers on its promises

They've got it! Winding Rivers' production of My Fair Lady is a "must see" for everyone.

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Word has been spreading far and wide about My Fair Lady, WRAPS' latest production, and the word is Excellent!

Excellent, enjoyable, top notch, delightful also come to mind.

Expectations were high for Winding River's performance of this old familiar musical, and they were met with flying colours.

The 26-member cast kept to a quick pace for the three-hour production, singing, dancing and trading barbs, letting the time just fly by.

Unfortunately, accoustics in the old school gym made it hard to hear some of the words in the songs, but it did not detract from the enjoyment: the actors delivered their lines in a way that could not be misunderstood.

Nancy Duchaine as Eliza Doolittle gets an A plus for her range of accents, switching back and forth from Cockney to "upper class," while John Kidder as professor Henry Higgins is delightful as the confirmed bachelor lost in his own little world where the only thing that matters is passing Eliza off as a lady, rather than the street urchin she was when they met months earlier.

Although the cast spend hundreds of hours in rehearsal, many of the scenes felt fresh and spontaneous, such as the dancing between Eliza and Henry during the Rain in Spain number.

And during the Ascot Racecourse scene where Eliza is recounting an amusing story of an aunt who died of influenza, we can see Henry behind her, elated at her perfect speech. But his happiness turns to horror as the story relates how her uncle ladled gin down his wife's throat in a futile attempt to save her and Eliza's dialect returns to its Cockney roots.

Old favourites like On the Street Where You Live and I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face have stayed with us for days, along with the voices of Gerald Young and John Kidder who sang them in this production.

You can't describe this production without mentioning the great costumes and ingenious set design.

The costuming was a challenge, according to director Mavourneen Varcoe-Ryan, mainly because of the volumn of costumes needed. Some of the actors went through several costume changes during the course of the evening.

And the set design was mininal yet very effective in setting the scene.

Also challenging was the ballroom scene as several couples waltzed around the stage, managing to look like they were having fun while avoiding running into each other.

Sloane Hammond was engaged to teach the actors how to ballroom dance early on in the rehearsals, and the extra help paid off hugely.

One last kudo to Barbara Roden who plays Mrs. Pearce, professor Higgins' housekeeper. It was pure acting talent that allowed her to keep a straight face while helping Higgins with his overcoat as he asked/sang: "Why can't a woman be more like a man?"

Roden said after the performance that she suspected keeping a straight face in front of her employer was likely a daily challenge for Mrs. Pearce.

Director Mavourneen Varcoe-Ryan says the easiest part of the production was finding the talented cast – willing participants who have been involved in past WRAPS productions.

"There was a buzz that people wanted to do a musical," she says, "and this one floated to the top."

Casting can be tricky, she says, but “I think we were really lucky to have such talent in this town.”

Many of the cast just seemed to be a natural fit to their characters, like Jim McLean as the common-sensical Col. Pickering, and David Dubois as the humourous, larger than life professor Zoltan Karpthy.

The production engaged the Sage Sands Singers under the direction of Michelle Reid to be the chorus, and they did an excellent job.

Varcoe-Ryan said Reid worked tirelessly and also brought other characters like Gerald Young into the cast.

“My favourite part,” she said, “is probably the spontaneous ovation from the audience, and seeing it all coem together. Seeing the actors all shine.”

Special favourites are the dramatic scenes in the second act where the actors drop their velvet gloves and the reality of their relationships come to the surface.

Given the last two sold out performances, the company has added another matinee performance on Saturday to go along with the two scheduled performances on Friday and Saturday nights in the old Ashcroft elementary school

Admission is by donation, but it’s recommended that you go early. Word is spreading quickly of this wonderful production and seating is limited.