

Pygmalion

What an evening! What a cast! What silly tomfoolery (because let's be honest, there was some of that too).

by Rachel Berry

The curtains open on a rainy Covent Garden, where phonetics professor Henry Higgins first encounters the ruffled Liza crooning over two branches of damaged violets, and trying her best to sell the rest to irritable bystanders. It sets the scene for Victorian London; a divided society - the poor, the well-heeled and a scattering of folks in between - thrown together and held captive by an equalizing bit of rain.

The cast is stellar, relaxing easily into spontaneous emotion and carrying the narrative with obvious enjoyment.

Aanya Jain's portrayal of Liza Doolittle is luminous. She grows steadily in confidence throughout the acts, transforming from squashed cabbage leaf into rebelliously independent woman; a delightful transition to watch. Across the stage from her, Ben Fraser's skillful performance exudes the endearing but maddening *joie de vivre* one hopes to see in Henry Higgins; the character finds amusement in all things from toy dinosaurs to ill-considered phonetic experiments.

The experiment in question - to pass Cockney flower girl Liza off as a duchess simply by altering her speech - is a daring one. A stern Mrs Pearce tries but fails to talk Higgins out of his foolish plan. Katy Mai's embodiment of the no-nonsense housekeeper is spot-on - abrupt but kind to



Photo: Aiden Fung

Liza, while all the time waving her feather duster threateningly at Higgins. Buffeted along by Higgins' boyish energy, Colonel Pickering, played by Ryan Wong, eggs Henry on in his quiet way (fuelled by the actors' real-life friendship, this is a pleasing portrayal of the Higgins/Pickering relationship). In contrast to Higgins' casual cruelty, Ryan brings a refreshingly gentle performance of courtesy and respect that encourages Liza.

When the strangers from Act 1 curiously find themselves all together again in Mr Higgins' living room, they endure a comical merry-go-round of "how do you do's" and are met by quite a different version of Liza. Mrs and Miss Eynsford-Hill - played excellently by Jena Fraser and Simone Jacob - exchange offended looks, roll their eyes and hand out a large serving of well-timed sass. The duo are perfectly matched and practically humming with tangible chemistry. In another chair, an



Photo: Aiden Fung

enraptured Freddy Hill, wonderfully brought to life by Yunbo Shim, is awfully interested in Liza and her new “small talk”. Animated and dashing, Freddy had plenty of trouble getting a cab in Act 1, but succeeded in winning the girl of his dreams by Act 5; it goes to show what can happen when you really put your mind to something.

A stately Mrs Higgins floats on and off stage, glowing with good sense and slapping Higgins and Pickering with the truth that they may not be doing Liza any favours. Maia Naadat encapsulates perfectly Mr Higgins’ intelligent mother who is horrified by her dear son’s plans, but is kind to Liza and ultimately proves to be the girl’s confidant.

Liza works hard on pronouncing her vowels and ‘speaking proper’, and successfully slips unnoticed into high society. Higgins’ bet is won, the experiment is over, and a masterfully executed final act leaves him torn between the misery of Liza’s leaving and delight at her independence.

And ah yes, we must thank the Bystander from Selsey - without his tetchy quips in Act 1, Higgins may well have been allowed to take down Liza’s words undetected, and we would not find ourselves caught up in this gripping narrative. A late addition to the production,

Jack Fraser completed the cast, bringing to life the cantankerous bystander that set the wheels in motion between the pillars of Covent Garden... but let’s not talk about those pillars.

Before we go, we take our hats off to the driving force behind the show, Mr Brad Garrett, who worked tirelessly to craft this delicious adaptation of Shaw's Pygmalion. It is a beautifully structured play that handled the themes of privilege and self-respect with surprising vulnerability - a real triumph. Bravo!

By George Bernard Shaw; adapted and directed by Bradley Scott Garrett; costumes by Angel Garrett; lighting and sound by Aiden Fung and Yihan Kwon; hair by Rebecca Linsenbigler & Sophia Lim; makeup by Karla Cienfuegos, Christina Kim & Jyl Neri; wardrobe manager Natalie Teo; production stage manager Rachel Berry; technical supervisor Bradley Scott Garrett, Presented by the ICS Knight Crew at International Community School, 27A Jubilee Road; Singapore 128575. February 10th 2023. Running time: 1 hour, 10 minutes.

WITH: Ben Fraser (Henry Higgins), Aanya Jain (Liza Doolittle), Ryan Wong (Colonel Pickering), Maia Naadat (Mrs. Higgins), Katy Mai (Mrs. Pearce), Jena Fraser (Mrs. Eynsford Hill), Simone Jacob (Clara Eynsford Hill), Yunbo Shim (Freddy Eynsford Hill) and Jack Fraser (Bystander).