Drama Review
Les Misérables

The cast of *Les Misérables*, and their director Sarah Davison, were under intense pressure this year to not only deliver the usual high standard of every school production but also produce an excellent performance of one of the most popular musicals of all time. However, even before I had the pleasure of seeing it, this production had already been deemed 'the best production by the RGS yet,' and indeed this was echoed in the show receiving standing ovations on all three nights, a first for an RGS show.

Les Misérables focuses on the voices of the rebels during the 1832 Paris Uprising, with the story of Jean Valjean, or prisoner 24601, and his life-long run from the law after an unjust imprisonment of 19 years for stealing some bread, creating a centre for the play. Tom Rowarth was outstanding in his haunting depiction of Valjean, evoking the weariness and confliction of the character with complete ease and conviction. Indeed his performance of '*Bring Him Home*' was one of the standout performances of the night, not only displaying Tom's excellent acting but also his incredible vocal talents. David Lawrence created the perfect foil for Rowarth's Valjean as Javert, in his first main role in a school production, tackling the challenging role of the desperate Javert, and most successfully capturing the audience's sympathy in his final scene, where he shined both vocally and dramatically. Aoife Kennan was also extremely impressive in her portrayal of Fantine, a factory worker who is shunned by society when it is revealed she has an illegitimate daughter, with her vocals capturing a wonderful poignancy and regret, particularly in '*I Dreamed a Dream*.' Aoife also displayed a remarkable ability to stand out throughout her group numbers, ensuring that her performance was extremely memorable.

Meanwhile Luke McGarey, in his third lead role in a school production, took the romantic lead for the first time as Marius, caught in a tragic love triangle with Georgina Gill's Eponine, and Megan Shepherd's Cosette. Luke more than proved worthy of the task, with extremely impressive vocals, and once again proving his acting capabilities, shining particularly in '*Empty Chairs at Empty Tables*,' where he evoked the tragedy of his friends' deaths convincingly. Georgina Gill also gave one of the standout performances of the night, portraying the doomed Eponine beautifully and displaying excellent vocals in '*On My Own*,' whilst also easily gaining the sympathy of the audience in her superb portrayal of the hopelessness of unrequited love. The chemistry between Georgina and Luke must also be noted, which resulted in an enchanting performance of '*A Little Fall of Rain*.' Megan Shepherd once again displayed her impressive vocals in the role of Cosette, particularly shining in her scenes with Luke where she successfully portrayed complete adoration for Marius. Indeed Megan coped particularly well with a rather one dimensional character, whilst both Nandini Mishra and Imogen Penn showed there is a bright future for the RGS drama department with their beautiful renditions of '*Castle on a Cloud*,' as young Cosette on alternating nights.



Oliver Belfield took on the role of the rebel army leader, Enjolras, with impressive authority, producing rallying vocals in '*The People's Song*' that clearly asserted him in this commanding role, and roused not only his rebels onstage but also the audience. Similarly, Cameron Kirk created an extremely favourable Gavroche, displaying the bravery of the young boy in a heartbreaking manner, and also exhibiting some impressive acting skills that will no doubt be seen often in future productions. Indeed all the student rebels must be commended, both for their strong solos, and the professionalism with which the battle scenes were played out. Meanwhile, comic relief to these heavy battle scenes was provided through the Thenardiers, a hilariously corrupt married couple, played by Zac Wancke and Hannah Harrison. Zac once again displayed his skill as a comic actor, adding incredibly detailed quirks to his Mr Thenadier that ensured his performance of '*Master of the House*' was extremely memorable. Hannah also proved her skills as a comic actress, displaying hilarious reactions to Thenardier's various schemes.

Indeed it is remarkable that we have the talent in our school to fill so many key roles with so many great performances, and furthermore, the ensemble also played a pivotal role, with many of the actors taking minor solos and smaller parts with great aplomb. The dedication of the ensemble as a whole was seen throughout, with every member

reacting well in all of their scenes, creating a much richer and more detailed atmosphere to each scene than felt in other productions, this was felt most powerfully when the entire cast gave an extremely moving rendition of '*Do You Hear The People Sing?*' during the finale. However, the power of this ensemble would not have been felt without Miss Davison, who, aided by Miss Richardson, did an amazing job of directing the most challenging musical performed by the RGS yet. Indeed the sheer detail with which she directed was felt throughout with each character finely drawn and each song clearly worked to perfection under her excellent leadership.

The set was particularly noteworthy this year, with a specially constructed rotating stage that added yet another element of professionalism through its mirroring of the West End *Les Mis* stage, and bolstered the realism and poignancy of the tragic ending to the battle scenes. Mr Edwards must also be given credit for his outstanding set that yielded a convincing recreation of the depressing conditions of 19th Century Paris, further aided by the excellent costumes procured by Mrs Shaw-Kew, Ed Brooks and Ed Twaddle.

Furthermore, the orchestra itself produced top-class music that helped to add yet another professional layer to the production and was led by the very able Mr Key, having all clearly invested considerable time and effort to attain such high musical standards. The crew must also be applauded for their apt dealing with the demanding challenges of the lighting and sound, clearly showing the maintained strength of the backstage crew.

Ultimately this production of *Les Misérables* more than lived up to the hype of being the best musical yet performed at our school, with the cast and crew clearly showing their commitment and attention to detail throughout. It is indeed a credit to the drama department that there are so many able students to take on the huge cast requirements of *Les Mis*, without any flaws, and suggests that the quality of our school productions can only continue to rise in following years.

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