

Bring It On – The Musical

Date

Saturday 6th April 2019

Society

The Wranglers Youth Theatre Company

Venue

The Muse Theatre, Lipson Cooperative Academy

Type of Production

Musical

Director

Wendy Holmes, assisted by Diane Sullivan and Paul Clark

Music Director

Sharon Mitchell

Choreographer

Wendy Holmes, with additional choreography by Erin Crisp

Report

Bring It On! This was my first opportunity to see a production of this very modern musical. Based on the original hit movie 'Bring It On', this stage version features an original story by Tony Award winner Jeff Whitty (Avenue Q), with music and lyrics by Tony Award winning composers Lin-Manuel Miranda (now legendary for 'Hamilton') and Tom Kitt, with additional material by Broadway lyricist Amanda Green.

For a youth company, this was a real challenge on several counts - a musically difficult score with hip-hop/rap-style lyrics - cheerleader style choreography with gymnastic stunts - and plenty of colourful characters, with their jealousies and friendships, amongst two very different rival American high school cheerleading squads, who end up competing against each other at the National Cheerleading Championships.

The Wranglers Youth Theatre Company are a very talented group, who always strive to give a first-rate performance and in respect of the high-energy choreography devised by Wendy Holmes, they achieved some amazing stunts and very well controlled routines - well done.

Director Wendy Holmes, assisted by Diane Sullivan and Paul Clark, made full use of these youngsters' considerable acting talents and created some beautifully contrasting scenes between the more 'refined' girls of Truman High School's cheerleading squad and the hard-knock dance crew from the inner-city Jackson High School, visually enhanced by the appropriately different costumes and make-up devised by the Wardrobe team and Make-up artists. I was impressed by the angst and slightly threatening attitude realistically portrayed by Danielle and her gang.

As Musical Director, Sharon Mitchell had the difficult task of supporting the soloists and full company numbers with the challenging musical accompaniment. I thought the musical score on the whole was very brash, discordant and challenging in some respects for such young voices, so I must applaud Sharon and the cast in getting to grips with, and overcoming, the difficulties with some of the more musically challenging numbers. The volume of the music was generally balanced, with the singers using personal radio mics sensitively.

The enthusiasm and vitality of the cast was excellent from the beginning and the pace of the performance was brisk and sharp, with good, clean scene changes. There were some very commendable leading performances too. Kate Roche gave a very impressive performance as Campbell, celebrating her achievement as the newly named Captain of the Truman High School cheerleading squad, who then discovers that through a change in school district boundaries, she's forced to spend her final year at Jackson High School. Jackson High's aggressive dance team initially treat her as an unwelcome outsider and Campbell must use all her persuasive powers to convince them to let her join them.

Rhiannon Witt was very engaging as Danielle, the intimidating and posturing head of Jackson High School's dance crew, well supported by Erin Marshall as Nautica and Dan Lidstone as La Cienega - their number 'We Ain't No Cheerleaders' was quite powerful. Phoebe Skedgell as Bridget was just perfect as the quirky member of the Truman High School cheerleading squad, who has to endure yet another year as their mascot, but comes into her own when she also is transferred to Jackson High with Campbell and is an instant hit, not only with Danielle and her two buddies, but also with Twig, a cool dude nicely played here by Harry Dale.

Another young performer who impressed was Yasmin Elphick as Eva, who as Truman High School's newest and greenest member of the cheerleading squad, almost loses the school's chance of winning a place at the Nationals, but through dubious circumstances, finds herself as Captain, following Campbell's departure to Jackson High. Her portrayal of a jealous and manipulative youngster, determined to win at the Nationals at all costs, was very convincing, particularly in her number 'Killer Instinct', one of the best numbers in the show. There were good supporting roles, too, from Ela Wimpess and Ruby Gilmore as Skylar and Kylar, whose friendship and loyalty to Campbell is shaken by Eva's betrayal.

The young cast had obviously enjoyed the opportunity to perform this refreshingly different style of musical and were applauded warmly by the enthusiastically supportive audience. I should like to congratulate The Wranglers and this particular production team on achieving a very commendable standard with a very challenging piece of modern musical theatre.

The set and props were minimalist but effective, allowing enough space for a large cast. Costumes and makeup were all convincing and suitable for the many contrasting characters. Lighting and sound were appropriate for this style of musical. Well done to the creative team.

I should mention that when my daughters and I saw this performance we were interrupted by a fire alarm about ten minutes before the end of the first act! This was disruptive for everyone, and we were stood in the cold wind for some time before the alarm was called off. However, the audience and cast quickly settled for the final part of act one and I must praise the actors for their excellent focus returning to pick up the performance mid-way through. Very slick and professionally done.

This was another very enjoyable performance from The Wranglers Youth Theatre Company and I look forward soon to the senior company's production of 'Legally Blonde' in the summer. Thank you for the warm hospitality - it's always lovely to catch up with Wendy. Well done to you all.

Gareth Davies

NODA Representative, South West District 3

NB. Congratulations again to you all for your nominations and the winning category at the NODA SW Awards this year!

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