

Quiet in the House: Up in One skillfully stages 'Les Miz'

Matt Andrews 12:07 a.m. EDT July 24, 2014



(Photo: Courtesy photo)

Every once in a while something surprising happens that I love about theater. A distantly familiar play or an older musical I haven't seen in years sneaks up again and wows me. "Les Misérables," with its beautiful score and gripping story, is such a one, and Up in One Productions' rendition brought back wonderful memories of first seeing "Les Miz" in 1987. With fine singing and inventive staging, Up in One conquers the difficult challenges of this complex musical.

The hugely popular "Les Misérables" is infrequently produced on the local level because of its hefty design requirements and challenging sung-through storytelling. Based on the novel by Victor Hugo, "Les Misérables" tells the story of French peasant Jean Valjean and his quest for redemption in the early 19th century. Set against the backdrop of revolution, Valjean squares off through the decades against his unbending nemesis, police inspector Javert. "I Dreamed a Dream," "Who Am I?" "One Day More" and "Bring Him Home" are highlights of the spoils-of-riches score by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Herbert Kretzmer.

The entire company of this "Les Misérables" is to be commended for its success. Frank McGinnis is an admirable Jean Valjean with emotional punch and impressive vocal range. Joshua Patriarco is magnetic as Javert, powerful and with a poignant catharsis of character. Cheyenne See nails Epinone with a beautiful voice and raw passion, and Austin Christensen's Enjolras, leader of the rebellion, is strongly acted and nicely sung. Zack Marshall is convincing as Marius and he shows his musical prowess, as does Morgan Dean as Fantine and Pamela Edmonds as Cosette. Young cast members Evelyn Shannon and Maddox Skigen shine, and Julia Osterhoudt's "Castle on a Cloud" is pure delight.

Director/choreographer Kevin Archambault skillfully stages the large musical in an intimate way. It successfully fits the stage at the Center for Performing Arts at Rhinebeck, and the personal journeys of the characters and large battle scenes are equally enjoyable. Although some of the actors seem young for their roles, the vocal casting is notable. The entire production team should be proud: cool set, rich lighting and appealing costumes. Musical Director Matthew Woolever does an excellent job preparing his actors for the knockout score.

I haven't listened to the Broadway cast-album of "Les Misérables" in several years, that is, until my drive home after Up in One's opening night. Producer Diana di Grandi and the company of "Les Miz" have the wow-factor and this professor gives the production an A.

Matt Andrews is an associate professor and director of theater at Marist College. Contact him at matthew.andrews@marist.edu

If you go

What: "Les Misérables," presented by Up in One Productions

When: Weekends through Aug. 17; 8 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; 3 p.m. Sunday

Where: The Center for Performing Arts at Rhinebeck, 661 Route 308, Rhinebeck

Tickets: \$27, adults; \$25, seniors/children under 12

Information: Call 845-876-3080; visit www.centerforperformingarts.org

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