

Review

Author: **Louise Colohan**

A Rodgers and Hammerstein classic where East meets West, we find the King of Siam desperately trying to progress his country to more modern practices of the western world. In doing so he hires an English widow, Anna to come and teach the ways of the western world to his children and wives. Speaking good English of course would be key to his countries progression. The love story running along side this is of two young lovers who have been separated from each other when Tuptim is given to the King as a present.

This show deals with some heavy life and social issues, but mainly the theme is change. A king trying to change his kingdom but who understands so little of the modern world of which he is so keen to follow. A widow Anna and her son Louis who seek an adventure and a new life in Siam, how much does she need to change her mind-set to understand the ways of the new world she has just entered.

This is a great crowd pleaser show and has all the elements of a classic musical, a wonderful score, a meaty script holding dramatic themed scenes and some great comedy.

The opening of this production set the tone for what was to follow, two girls entered from opposite sides of the theatre in eastern dress and performed a short dance giving us a flare of that warm eastern culture.

The overall feel of the show captured the essence of Siam and the culture did come throughout. The direction in general was capable and we understood the story well, the general cast played their part very well and executed all their scenes with grace and enthusiasm. We could see that the cast understood the discipline that would have been expected in the King's palace and equally their curiosity when Anna arrived. Well done each one of you.

Singing for the company was strong with some nice harmonies coming through especially throughout "The small house of uncle Thomas" where it was very polished. Musical director Treona Holden did a great job at the fore and at times I couldn't help but watch her on the monitor she lived every minute of this score with the cast, great support from her especially at times when a tempo got lost by a cast member she brought it right back.

Choreography was simple and well thought out. It was polished and kept in line with the flat foot style required for this culture, one or two wobbly legs but it is a hard-balancing act. If I may be so bold as to single out one young lady that portrayed the part of Eliza, who danced her part beautifully and had a lovely presence in this piece.

Robert Earl, played a wonderful part, we had a love hate relationship with him from the onset. Fantastic comedic timing from this character and he really portrayed the light and shade of the King. Strong willed and stubborn in equal measure to that of Anna. He dealt with the harsh theme well and we could feel his coldness coming through but with lovely glimpses of warmth when he spoke to his oldest son. Very enjoyable performance.

Emma Walker handled the role of Anna very well giving a lovely robust performance. A lovely actress with so much warmth coming through. Equally strong willed and stubborn but

with a hint of manipulation to achieve what is required. The development of the relationship is more apparent in this character and her heart is certainly worn on her sleeve. A sweet singer with a convincing range but her acting was really her strong suit with lovely comedy delivery and immense disapproval with some of the practices of Siam.

Barbara Turner played a very good role of Lady Thaing, head wife. A good accent on the most part and a good deal warmer than I have seen this part previously, but I enjoyed her interpretation. Her vocal range is simply magnificent and she gave one of the most controlled vocal performance of the evening in her rendition of Something Wonderful. Solid performance throughout.

Ellie Dodd, played Tuptim with some nice character, understanding the role of the love torn young lady who desperately wants to escape the palace. She has a good singing voice in her lower, mid register but needs to work on getting some sweetness in to the higher head notes. In saying that she held her role well. I would like to have seen more chemistry between her and Lun Tha to help us invest more in this part of the story.

Lun Tha had a nice presence in his scenes, played the role with urgency. He has a good tone to his voice, but there were some tuning issues in his duet with Tuptim, I have Dreamed. Overall a nice performance here.

Richard Wain found a good interpretation to his character, one that is generally one dimensional in other productions, he gave it some nice comic touches and made this cameo role quite memorable and certainly allowed us to see the displeasure of the king when Anna's attention was turned to Sir Edward.

Ben Mather, well what a lovely performer with great promise of making a very fine actor. Great presence and a smile that is infectious. Good singing voice and preformed his scenes very well.

Harrison France played the heir to the throne well, a strong chin and walk gave us what we required to understand his placing in this story. He dealt with his vocal number well. With some work, he will gain more confidence in his singing discipline and make a fine performer.

Other roles of Prime minister, Captain Orton, Karalahome, were played well and the director achieved all the comedy and empathy required in these roles.

Lighting plot was good overall and the sound balance was good mostly, on a few occasions we had some muffled mics and the band were at times overpowering the vocals. This was rare but worth mentioning as we missed a few lines of songs due to this.

The costume and wig department should be applauded for the lovely visual achieved. Costumes were finished off with beautiful head dresses and wigs. If I were to nit-pick it would be that Anna's dresses were on the short side, her footwear was not appropriate of the period but I assume it may have been about height on this occasion. It didn't take from the performance it just stood out to me as not looking quite right.

Staging was intelligent and somewhat in the round at times by using the floor level, this really brought the show to the audience and we could feel the body energy cooking from each character. The display piece of marble look stone and two fine lions were just enough

to give the impression of grandeur and wealth if this kingdom. Other required scenes were portrayed with back drops and these worked well. Any curtain moving was done at speed and the crew worked well.

Overall a very production with some very standout performances.