



Society : The Chameleons Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : Pygmalion
Date : 24th September 2010
Venue : The Kingsland Hall, United Reformed Church, East Lane, Wembley
Report by : Harvey Kesselman

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Having seen many productions of "My Fair Lady", I looked forward to seeing the source of that musical written in 1913 by George Bernard Shaw. Although the film MFL has a different ending to the original play, the scenes with the pebbles and the blowing out of the candle in her attempts to pronounce her aitches together with her outburst in the Ascot scene is funny, none of these appear in Shaw's play. I much prefer her exit line in Pygmalion at Mrs. Higgins' afternoon garden party. Still I suppose 'move your bloomin' arse' was more amusing to the American audiences than 'Walk! Not bloody likely.....'.

The opening scene played in front of curtains was well done although, because of the lack of space, the principals seemed a little restricted and were almost in a straight line. Mrs. Eynsford-Hill and daughter Clara's costumes were elegant, but Freddy and Colonel Pickering should have worn evening dress as they had all just come from a performance at Covent Garden Opera House. However, it was quite correct for Higgins to be in mufti.

There was a most enjoyable performance by **Michelle Edwards** as Eliza Doolittle. She acted well, her 'cockney' dialogue was kept up and the change to speaking 'posh' was delightful. Even when not actually involved, for instance when Higgins and Pickering are talking, she was animated without distracting the audience from their dialogue. Her realization at the end that she could '.....do without' Higgins and the change in, not only her accent, but also her whole way of life, was excellent. Her outburst after the ball, being ignored by the two men and then throwing the slippers at Higgins was wonderful. The part of Professor Henry Higgins is quite a marathon. His dialogue has to be clear and concise, his attitude to life almost ethereal, seemingly unaware of anyone's feelings, the only interest he has is the English language and its correct pronunciation. **Stuart Everett** carried off the part very well. The only slight criticism is that he seemed to get annoyed too often, which meant that when he really needed to be angry with Eliza at the end of the play, he had no where to go. Nevertheless, it was a fine performance and his dialogue was well projected. Colonel Pickering is a very important part insofar as he has to be the voice of sanity in the crazy Higgins household. He is the go-between Eliza and Higgins. Whereas Higgins is full of bluster and seems to have no respect for anyone, Pickering is the voice of reason. **Robert Spolander** was just right in the part, managing to bring Higgins down to earth, whereas Higgins treats Eliza rather appallingly, Pickering is much kinder and understanding. Alfred Doolittle (not Arthur as listed in the programme) is a gem of a part and **Steve Angus** revelled in it. With his gruff voice, his cockney accent, (with a Welsh strain!!), the wonderful dialogue, particularly the 'undeserving poor' speech, Steve was in his element. His final scene dressed in a 'posh' costume was a delight.

Mrs. Pearce, the housekeeper, flits in and out in act two; she speaks of her concern regarding Higgins taking in a 'common flower girl' and wonders what will become of Eliza at the end of the 'experiment'. **Jeanette Hutchinson** was quite stern with Eliza and berates Higgins for swearing in front of Eliza. However she tended to drop her voice at the end of her sentences and her face often wore a scowl, but she was quite firm in her attitude to Higgins and his foibles. **Arlette Kamellard** was a rather regal Mrs. Higgins, very deliberate in her dialogue, able to tolerate her son and his strange occupation, just hoping he will meet a 'nice-looking young woman'. It is she that Eliza turns to when she leaves Wimpole Street, and it is she who tries to make her son come to his senses and

treat the girl with respect. A nicely controlled performance from Arlette. Other characters in this wonderful play contributed to its success; **Jason Kosky**, as Freddy Eynsford-Hill, did not seem quite as home in the role, he should have played it as a sort of Bertie Wooster character, rather simple but well-meaning. More attention should have also been made to his costume, particularly his jacket that did not fit and, as a result, looked very untidy. **Catherine Waters** and **Simone Lee-Tyrassek** as Mrs. Eynsford-Hill and her daughter Clara were very good as a rather snobbish upper-class couple. Mrs. Eynsford-Hill is shocked at Eliza's outburst when she exited Mrs. Higgins' tea party, although Clara was quite amused and thought it was a way of getting away from Victorian snobbery, whilst Freddy thought it wonderful. Their final acceptance of Eliza's use of language as 'the new small talk' was very funny, and that whole scene, particularly Eliza's dialogue, was very well done. **Kathryn Priest** doubled up as a bystander in the first scene, and then Mrs. Higgins's Parlour Maid in Act Three, and **Merra Pandit** was the 'sarcastic' bystander also in the first scene. Although the performance went well and was most enjoyable, I felt that a lot more could have been done with the set. Usually the sets are imaginative and fit the various productions, 'allo 'allo is a good example. However the rather minimalist set on this occasion left a lot to be desired. The wall at the back of the set just had two pictures and an empty picture hook and something that looked like a chest of drawers or perhaps a drinks cabinet. On the right wall there were other pictures including at least one framed in something that looked like a clip frame (barely thought of in the early 20th Century). In what was supposed to be Higgins laboratory and sitting room, there was a lack of furniture and little sign of various recording machines, which were the tools of his 'business'. Fortunately this did not distract from the otherwise very good production.

As usual, there were a number of people behind the scenes that, although never seen, nevertheless are important to any production. I have already written about the set designed by **Denis O'Brien** and built by the company, which I have to say, was rather a disappointment. **Nikki Amory** as Stage Manager made certain all ran smoothly; **John Jetten** was responsible for the Sound and Lighting; **Heather Collins** was i/c props; Costumes, **Helen Stevens** and **Simone Lee-Tyrassek**; Rostrum Hire **Denis Cater** and Production Manager **Robert Spolander**. The programme was well designed and informative by **Nikki Amory** (pity about Doolittle's first name being printed as Arthur and not Alfred)

As Director, **Sally Crowley**, assisted by **Alex Forni**, is to be congratulated, they made certain that the cast achieved the right pace, the dialogue was clear and the evening was very successful.

Although not written in the play, according to Shaw's final notes Eliza does marry Freddy.....