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Theater Review

by Melinda Calvert

Published July 24, 2008

Riding on the coattails of last season's phenomenal success of "South Pacific," the Aerospace Players have again gone all out with their newest production, "My Fair Lady." The Players are known for presenting top notch plays on a grand scale and this is certainly no exception. The players, the costumes, the sets -- everything -- is elaborate and detailed. And, for all of you who saw the Oscar-winning film a dozen times (like I did), the Players haven't left out any of those important elements that make both the film and stage version so wonderful.



Pygmalion was written by George Bernard Shaw in 1912 and became "My Fair Lady" when Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe adapted it for Broadway in 1956. The 1964 film was equally as impressive garnering several Academy Awards, including the big ones for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actor. It also did well in the Golden Globes (winning in the same three categories as the Oscars) and the New York Film Critics Circle.

The opening scene of the play takes place after the opera at Covent Garden where we see phonetics professor, Henry Higgins, standing unobtrusively off to the side listening to the variety of dialects being spoken by the passersby and grumbling "Why Can't the English?" speak English (properly, that is). One in particular catches his attention, Eliza Doolittle, a poor flower girl who seems to be doing quite a job on the English language. Spurred on by his friend Colonel Pickering, Higgins brags that he can turn Eliza into a lady within six months and be able to introduce her into polite society without anyone being the wiser as to her lowborn position. Intrigued by what he said, Eliza decides to take him up on it and goes to visit him the next morning. The rest, they say, is history...well, not exactly, but it is here where the real story begins.

Let me note that, although the film was 2:40 long, that was nothing compared to this production. It is looong! The play, well over three hours, didn't break for intermission until about two hours in, so be prepared.

There were many noteworthy performances, but the two main characters grabbed most of the attention. As Eliza, Melissa Geiger is magnificent as she first butchers, then masters the English language, and becomes transformed at the same time. And J.C. Kern gives a strong, completely credible performance as the egotistical 'enry 'iggins, who looks on without pity while he drills poor Eliza day and night on the finer points of the English language. I thoroughly enjoyed Ron Rudolph's humorous portrayal of Colonel Pickering as well as Scott Clifford's clever Alfred P. Doolittle characterization, especially when he meets Prof. Higgins in a wonderfully amusing scene. Doolittle's drinking partners were almost as disarming. Cathryn Starr is very good in the role of Higgins' sympathetic housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, and, as Eliza's ardent admirer, Freddy Eynsford-Hill, Drew Fitzsimmons is completely perfect as a young man who is head-over-heels in love.

Under the skillful direction of Bradley Baker, things ran smoothly, and the presentation I attended went off pretty much without a hitch. JoMarie Rosser and Myrna Robinson produce and the Asst. Director is Neil Moutrey; Jeannine Barba and Lawrence A. Moreno are choreographers with Barba and Pam McNulty is in charge of costumes. Mark Aguero conducts the orchestra.

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A China mission shrouded in secrecy
About Town

Supreme Court backs oilman's lawsuit

A donated statue seeks a home in Hermosa Beach

Police and canine chase and catch a fleeing laptop thief

One more midnight closure; 'horrific' hotel shot down

About Town

MANHATTAN BEACH

About Town

School trustee Eisen recall set for November

'Fab 5's' Switzer remembered as straight shooter

Money troubles rooted in city tree ordinance

About Town

Board to put forth \$64-M bond-measure

Union war erupts in Manhattan Beach

City books library renovation plans

Memorial surf contest marks 10th anniversary

REDONDO BEACH

About Town

City launches revitalization effort

Music from the Redondo 'hood

About Town

Pier music club changes plan, name

'Vicious dog' hearing ends in acquittal

Police seek assistance identifying injured man

Mixed-use vote delayed

About Town

SPORTS

Beach Cities Sports

Fifth seed victorious at Manhattan Beach Open

Beach Open

Olympians fine tune game before Beijing

Nine locals win gold medals at AAU National Championships

Playboy pics, Williams' sideshow make way for Classic in Carson

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Williams sisters among elite lineup

The music of "My Fair Lady" is exquisite and, I'm sure, one of the main reasons for its staying power. The sets are big and resplendent. In fact everything about this production is big -- the cast, the crew, the sets -- and the entertainment. This is your opportunity to see a really fine musical. If you liked the movie, don't miss this production.

"My Fair Lady" ends this weekend. James Armstrong Theater, 3330 Civic Center Drive in Torrance, performance times are Thursday - Saturday (July 24-26) at 8 p.m. with a 2 p.m. matinee on Saturday (July 25). Tickets are: adults \$15 and seniors, students, kids \$13. Call the Armstrong Theatre Box Office at 310-781-7171 and for more information call Flora Morin at 310-336-7222 or visit www.aeclubs.org/theater. ER

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