

Society : SPT
Production : The Great British Bake Off Musical
Date : 24th April 2026
Venue : SPT
District : 14

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Show Report

Overview

Walking into Shinfield Players Theatre is always a bit like arriving somewhere familiar, even if you haven't been for a while. There's a warmth to the place that's hard to manufacture, and it really matters. You're greeted, you're welcomed, and you settle in quickly. That atmosphere set the tone beautifully for this production, and it's worth saying up front because it genuinely enhances the whole experience.

This was a joyful, detail-rich and musically confident staging of a surprisingly strong script. It's easy to underestimate just how clever *The Great British Bake Off Musical* is as a piece of writing, but here it was treated with care and understanding. Director Jamie Milburn clearly has a real affection for the material (and, it seems, cakes themselves), and that love translated into a production that leaned into fun, character and storytelling without losing shape or control.

The show relies heavily on strong blocking and clear character work, and this was largely achieved. The ensemble numbers were particularly impressive, with harmonies that were tight, confident and often genuinely moving, especially in *Don't Send Me Home* and the finale. There was a real sense that the company enjoyed being on stage together, and that connection came across.

Attention to detail was a standout throughout. From the wonderfully specific costuming to the props (yes, including a Smeg fridge), everything felt considered. Even small touches, like Gemma's first slightly mismatched outfit, added texture and truth. The choreography was intricate and playful, clearly well-rehearsed, and packed with clever syncopation that brought energy to the stage.

If there was one small note, it would be that the opening number didn't quite land with the punch it needed. It was good, certainly, but just lacked that initial spark to fully grab the audience from the first beat. A touch more dynamic build or clearer focus could elevate it further. Similarly, while the band sounded excellent, having them positioned in a way that allowed more presence in the room would give certain numbers even more impact, though this is understood within the constraints of the space.

That said, the show found a lovely balance of humour, heart and theatricality. From the brilliantly silly "scone vs scone" moments to genuinely emotional songs like *Grow* and *My Dad*, it offered light and shade in all the right places. And yes, the euphemisms around strudels landed exactly as they should.

A warm, witty, and very enjoyable evening.

The Cast

This was a strong ensemble, with each performer contributing to the overall success of the piece while still carving out distinct, memorable characters.

Heidi Ashton (Babs)

Heidi delivered Babs with warmth, charm and a wonderfully cheeky East End energy. She was consistently engaging, and her comic instincts were spot on, particularly in her love of adding a little something extra to the recipes. Her chemistry with Phil was a real highlight, and she held her own beautifully in her musical moments.

Matt Chishick (Ben)

Matt brought sincerity and emotional truth to Ben, capturing both his nervousness and his underlying warmth. His portrayal of a father navigating vulnerability was genuinely touching. Vocally, he was strong and assured, grounding the character effectively.

Robert Welch (Dezza)

A delight from start to finish. Robert had some of the best comic moments in Act One and made the most of every opportunity. His timing was sharp, and his portrayal of the laid-back, vegan, boat-living Dezza was both endearing and very funny.

Emma Sanders (Francesca)

Emma handled a sensitive storyline with care and restraint. Her performance never tipped into melodrama, instead offering something quietly powerful. Her delivery of *Grow* was particularly moving, showcasing both vocal strength and emotional depth.

Jessica Morton (Gemma)

A standout performance. Jessica brought a real sparkle to Gemma, capturing her insecurity and growth beautifully. Her character journey was clear and engaging, and she balanced humour and vulnerability with ease.

Lucy Roberts (Izzy)

Lucy committed fully to Izzy's ambition and intensity, and it paid off. Her characterisation remained consistent throughout, even in background moments, which added depth. Her vocal performances were delivered with confidence and energy.

Joseph Morbey (Hassan)

Joseph delivered a thoughtful and sincere performance as Hassan. He handled the character's backstory with sensitivity and care, bringing a quiet authenticity that really grounded the role. There was a lovely sense of youthful awkwardness in his portrayal, which felt entirely appropriate, and he approached the part with respect and honesty, making it both believable and engaging to watch.

Scott Fyfe Jamieson (Russell)

Scott's Russell was wonderfully awkward and precise, with a strong sense of identity. His attention to detail in both physicality and costume made the character feel fully realised. A very enjoyable performance.

Elisabeth Richardson (Cameo)

Though a smaller role, Elisabeth made an impact whenever she was on stage. Her presence was purposeful, and she contributed nicely to the overall world of the show.

Sarah Clarke (Jim)

Sarah brought great energy and humour to Jim, leaning into the presenter-style awkwardness with confidence. Her interactions with Kim were particularly strong.

Mazz Hancock (Kim)

Mazz matched Sarah's energy brilliantly, and together they created a believable and entertaining presenting duo. Their chemistry felt natural and well-paced.

Angie Chitty (Dame Pam Lee)

A real showstopper. Angie embraced the role fully, delivering a performance that was vibrant, funny and packed with personality. From soggy bottoms to bold costumes (and those sunglasses), every detail was spot on. Her accent work and vocal delivery were both excellent.

Neil Padgen (Phil Hollinghurst)

Neil was fantastic. His accent work, particularly while singing, was impressive, and he embodied the role with confidence and charm. His performance in *Slap It Like That* was a highlight, full of energy and humour.

Hannah Misselbrook (Lily)

Hannah brought a lovely innocence and sincerity to Lily. Her performance was heartfelt without being overly sweet, and she was a joy to watch whenever she appeared.

Creative Team & Technical

Director **Jamie Milburn** delivered a confident and engaging production, full of energy and heart. His passion for musical theatre and entertainment was clear, and he demonstrated strong control over staging, character and pacing. It's been lovely to see how his work has evolved.

Musical Director **Chris Cherng**, supported by Assistant Musical Director **Lara Savory**, ensured the show was musically strong throughout. The harmonies were a standout feature, and the overall sound was rich and well-balanced.

Choreographer **Millie Wilkins** delivered intricate, clever and highly effective routines. The level of detail, particularly in the syncopation and use of props, was impressive and clearly required a huge amount of rehearsal.

Producer **Catherine Wilkins** oversaw a polished production, with excellent attention to detail from front of house through to the final curtain.

The band, made up of **Chris Cherng (Keys 1)**, **Mark Webb (Keys 2)**, **Amy Fitz-Desorgher (Woodwinds)**, **Harry Travis (Guitars)**, **Louise Lloyd (Bass)** and **Martin Carrick (Drums/Percussion)**, provided a rich and vibrant musical foundation. They sounded excellent throughout, and you could feel their energy, even if slightly removed from view.

Hair support from **Pam Dennis** added to the overall polished look of the production.

The non-baked props and costumes team, **Catherine Wilkins, Cate Naylor, Debbie Wheeler, Graham Smith** and **Emma Fuller**, delivered exceptional attention to detail. Every item felt considered and specific, adding depth and authenticity to the world of the show.

The bakes creation team, **Jessica Wilkins, John Watts, Catherine Wilkins, Dean Wilkins** and **Millie Wilkins**, deserve special mention. The inclusion of real baked goods was a standout feature, adding charm, authenticity and an extra layer of visual delight.

Lighting Designer and Operator **Graeme Rhodes** created a vibrant and dynamic visual environment, with thoughtful use of focus and colour. Moments like the French-themed lighting were particularly effective.

Sound Operator and Tech Lead **Pete Ashton** delivered a strong and well-balanced sound throughout. Vocals were clear, harmonies were well supported, and notably there were very few microphone issues, which is no small achievement.

The set build team and backstage crew, led by **Sam Turner**, including **Lucy Watkins, Keith Stoneman, Yvonne Mitchell, Tim Howling, Di Copel, Natalie Clark, Clive Dolbie** and **Steve Toon**, created a detailed and functional environment that supported the action beautifully. Scene changes were smooth, and everything worked seamlessly to maintain the flow of the show.

Stage Manager **Sam Turner** ensured the production ran smoothly throughout, keeping everything coordinated behind the scenes.

Final Thoughts

This was a production full of heart. It was clear that everyone involved cared deeply about what they were creating, and that care came through in every detail, from the performances to the props to the atmosphere in the building.

Could the opening land with more impact? Yes. Could the band be given more presence if space allowed? Ideally. But these are refinements, not criticisms of the overall achievement.

At its core, this was a warm, funny, musically strong and genuinely enjoyable piece of theatre. And perhaps the biggest compliment is this: you left feeling lighter than when you arrived.

And honestly, what more could you want from a show about cake?

Charlotte Gouldsmith Leigh NODA Representative London Region District 14

Addendum

For this performance of *The Great British Bake Off Musical*, I am focusing on the role of Lily, Ben's daughter and the show's principal child character. Lily enters towards the end of Act One and is then seen at intervals throughout Act Two, bringing warmth and lively energy that help underline Ben's story.

Although she is not on stage for long stretches, Lily is an important presence. The performer needs clear diction, confident movement, and the ability to establish a believable father-daughter relationship quickly. The role also includes the solo *My Dad*, which calls for secure pitching and a simple, truthful delivery.

Ayda Mae Rodi (Lily) gave a bright, engaging performance that immediately established Lily's character and purpose within the story. She brought plenty of fun, with just the right amount of cheek for a nine-year-old, while keeping her reactions grounded and believable. Vocally, her solo *My Dad* was delivered with clear tone, confident tuning, and diction that carried well. Her stagecraft was assured: she looked comfortable in the space, picked up cues promptly, and maintained focus even in the busier moments. Most notably, her relationship with Ben (Matt Chischick) felt natural and sustained, with warm, responsive interaction that helped the audience invest in their bond. I particularly enjoyed the comic delivery around "the dad joke"! Overall, this was a confident contribution in a key supporting role, and Ayda Mae Rodi conveyed Lily's warmth and energy very effectively.



Gordon Bird
NODA Youth Coordinator - London Region