

Society : SPT
Production : Battle of the Musicals
Date : 3rd October
Venue : SPT
District : 14

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[Show Report](#)

Overview

Four musicals, four enthusiastic teams and an audience with the deciding vote: Battle of the Musicals offered a lively premise for an evening of musical theatre. Bringing together Wicked, My Fair Lady, Les Misérables and Mamma Mia!, SPT gave a full house of all ages plenty to enjoy, with impressive solo performances, spirited ensemble numbers and opportunities to join in. It was lovely to see an evening that brought people together through such familiar and much-loved music.

The breadth of vocal talent was one of the production's greatest strengths. There were performances of real power, others of touching simplicity, and several moments where the connection between singer and song was particularly moving. The bold colour choices also gave each musical a clear identity, helping the audience move between four very different worlds.

The competition concept was appealing, although the storytelling linking the sections didn't always feel as assured as the musical performances themselves. The opening explanation about the power of musicals established the idea, but the subsequent exchanges between the competing characters needed a clearer purpose and stronger rapport. A tighter linking script, with more distinct personalities and a clearer reason for each interaction, would help the battle develop naturally and give the audience more to invest in between songs.

The audience ultimately crowned Mamma Mia! the winner, and its infectious energy certainly made a persuasive case. For me, however, Les Misérables provided the strongest overall section, combining excellent singing with the most consistent dramatic conviction. Such differences of opinion are, of course, part of the fun. Give a roomful of musical theatre enthusiasts a vote and you're unlikely to get a quiet evening!

Performances

Wicked

Rachael Allan introduced Wicked as its devoted superfan, setting the scene for the first team's bid for victory. Her introduction gave the section useful context, although a little more theatrical sparkle and a stronger sense of personal passion would have made the opening pitch more persuasive. This applied to the superfan introductions generally: there was room to let each advocate's enthusiasm become a performance in its own right.

"No One Mourns the Wicked" made a strong ensemble opening. There was plenty of ambition in the sound, although some voices came through more prominently than others. With the performers apparently relying on overhead rather than individual microphones, this was understandable, but closer attention to positioning and ensemble dynamics would help achieve a more even balance.

Lucy Roberts sang "The Wizard and I" with pleasing tone and secure musicality. The next step would be to bring more of Elphaba's character into the performance, allowing her hopes and discoveries to shape the expression, physicality and phrasing. The vocal foundation was there; a stronger sense of the story unfolding would make it more compelling still.

Emma Sanders and **Mazz Hancock** captured the wit and humour of "What Is This Feeling?" Their interplay suited the number's comic friction, and the arrival of the ensemble added another welcome layer of energy. It was a good example of how character and music can work together to bring a familiar song to life.

"One Short Day" had the warmth, optimism and excitement needed for the arrival in the Emerald City. The ensemble's enthusiasm was infectious, and this was a particularly enjoyable moment in the section.

Milly Allwood-Rose was an absolute standout in "No Good Deed". The power and range of her voice were exceptional, but just as impressive was the feeling behind it. She committed wholeheartedly to the storytelling, giving a performance that was both vocally thrilling and dramatically convincing.

Sarah Clarke and **Lara Savory** brought the right emotional weight to "For Good". Their voices complemented one another beautifully, with pleasing harmonies and a shared sensitivity to the song's meaning. This was a thoughtful duet that allowed the emotion to come through without forcing it.

Caitlin Lammin delivered "Defying Gravity" in an arrangement adapted to suit their voice. They approached it with honesty and emotional commitment, making the interpretation feel personal. It was pleasing to hear a familiar number shaped around the performer's strengths.

The ensemble finale rounded off the section well, before **Beth Everied** led the "Popular" sing-along alongside Emma Sanders, Alexandra Bond, the ensemble and audience. Beth's lovely tone and vocal strength made a considerable impression, and I'd happily have heard more from her. Emma and Alexandra helped support the invitation to join in, giving the section an engaging finish.

My Fair Lady

Karen Payne introduced My Fair Lady with an interesting account of its background and the challenges involved in developing the musical. This gave the audience a useful starting point, while her featured contribution to "Just You Wait" also ensured she had a place within the musical selection itself.

Clare Kendall was a particular highlight in "Why Can't the English?" Her delivery had a wonderful sense of nostalgia and captured the character of a number so closely associated with Rex Harrison. She demonstrated that a song's personality needn't depend on the gender of the person singing it.

Jessica Morton brought a powerful voice and beautiful singing to “I Could Have Danced All Night”. It was a pleasure to hear her tackle such a well-loved number, and she later contributed to “Wouldn’t It Be Lovely”, showing her versatility across the evening.

Rachel Lockwood sang “On the Street Where You Live” with warmth and an appealing sense of period romance. Another number traditionally associated with a male performer, it worked very well in her hands. She conveyed the affectionate, nostalgic quality that makes this song such an enduring favourite.

“Wouldn’t It Be Lovely” brought together **Jessica Morton, Charis Luke, Helen Cuthbertson, Gilly Meek, Clare Kendall, Sharon Young** and the ensemble. It offered a welcome opportunity to hear different voices within the same selection and broadened the section beyond its principal solos. “Poor Professor Higgins” then provided a lovely ensemble lead-in to “The Rain in Spain”.

Cara Broadhurst, Clare Kendall and **Neil Coupland** shared “The Rain in Spain”, bringing together the familiar trio at the heart of the musical. Clare’s characterful work remained a strength of this section, while Cara and Neil also showed their range through their contrasting contributions elsewhere in the programme.

Derek Lockwood’s “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face” was wonderfully moving. His emotional delivery brought a tear to my eye, and he deserves particular credit for finding the tenderness within the song. This was a performance that reached beyond the notes and made a real connection.

George Apap led “Get Me to the Church on Time” with plenty of high spirits. The ensemble joined him in the fun, and the later “With a Little Bit of Luck” sing-along kept that energy going. These numbers gave the section a welcome sense of mischief and audience involvement.

The reprise of “I Could Have Danced All Night” helped bring the selection together. Overall, the transitions here were more assured than in *Wicked*, with a better sense of pace between songs. That improvement continued as the evening progressed, suggesting that the opening section would benefit from the same attention to the timing of exits, entrances and introductions.

My Fair Lady might not have been my own first choice for this particular contest, but that is a matter of personal taste. Its inclusion provided a useful contrast in style and gave several performers an opportunity to shine.

Les Misérables

Cara Broadhurst returned as the *Les Misérables* superfan, introducing what became, for me, the strongest section of the evening. Her involvement across different musical styles was welcome, and her later contribution to the “Master of the House” sing-along helped bring a lighter spirit to this otherwise emotionally demanding selection.

“At the End of the Day” was a rousing opening. The ensemble found the tension and urgency of the number, with voices that complemented one another particularly well. From the outset, this section had a strong sense of shared dramatic purpose.

Charis Luke sang “I Dreamed a Dream” with sincerity and demonstrated an attractive vibrato. Using that vibrato more selectively would allow some phrases to emerge with a cleaner, more direct sound, creating greater contrast when the emotion builds. She has a lovely voice and should be proud of what she achieved here.

Alexandra Bond led “Do You Hear the People Sing?” with the ensemble in another stirring performance. The number carried the drama and emotion associated with the musical, and the company gave it the collective

strength it needs. Alexandra's contributions across the evening also showed her willingness to move between very different musical moods.

Scott Fyfe-Jamieson was outstanding in "Stars". His tone was wonderful, and he brought a strong emotional connection to the performance. It was a memorable solo, delivered with a conviction that made it much more than a display of vocal ability.

"One Day More" was a knockout. **Kev Harvey, Caitlin Lammin, Emma Sanders, Alexandra Bond, Lara Savory, Derek Lockwood, Scott Fyfe-Jamieson, Mazz Hancock** and the ensemble brought together its overlapping voices and stories with tremendous impact. There was so much happening, yet the performance retained its sense of purpose and built to an exhilarating effect.

Alana Smith gave "On My Own" a touching sincerity. There was vulnerability in her voice that suited the song beautifully, and her delivery made a considerable impression. She allowed the emotion to speak clearly.

Neil Coupland's "Bring Him Home" was another exceptional moment. His clarity was particularly effective in this most beautiful of songs, and the quality of his singing was a real pleasure. Having already appeared in *My Fair Lady*, he showed a very different side of his abilities here.

Rachael Allan, Clare Kendall, Scott Fyfe-Jamieson and the ensemble brought the section to a strong conclusion in the finale. Rachael's move from superfan duties in *Wicked* to this ensemble contribution reflected the shared effort behind the evening, while Scott and Clare added to already impressive individual performances.

Of all the sing-alongs, "Master of the House" was my favourite. Led by **Kev Harvey and Cara Broadhurst**, with the ensemble and audience joining in, it provided a thoroughly enjoyable release after the preceding emotional intensity. It also gave Kev an opportunity to move from his compère role into a more mischievous musical contribution.

Mamma Mia!

Kit Brunton made a determined effort to rally the audience behind Mamma Mia! Her enthusiasm for the competition was clear and helped establish the lively atmosphere of the final section.

Milly Allwood-Rose opened with "I Have a Dream", displaying the same excellent clarity and vocal quality heard earlier in *Wicked*. It was particularly enjoyable to hear her in such a different style. The contrast showed that she could bring sensitivity as well as power to her singing.

The ensemble title number was full of life, with energetic choreography helping to establish the section's cheerful momentum. This sense of movement and enjoyment remained one of Mamma Mia!'s strongest assets.

Nickie Smith and **Sarah Clarke** shared "SOS", adding a duet to the selection and providing a change from the larger company numbers. Sarah's appearance here also offered a contrast with her earlier work in "For Good", while Nickie had a featured opportunity within the winning team's programme.

Kit Brunton returned for "Take a Chance on Me", delivering an enjoyable performance with the ensemble. There was scope to bring more cheekiness, flirtation and sass to the number, particularly through her reactions and exchanges with those around her. A little more playful confidence would help release the humour already present in the song.

Helen Cuthbertson's "Thank You for the Music" was a very enjoyable contribution. It was good to hear her take a featured moment after her earlier participation in *My Fair Lady*, and the number sat comfortably within this celebration of musical theatre.

Elisabeth Richardson, Lucy Roberts and **Jessica Morton** joined the ensemble for “Dancing Queen”. With the stage packed and the energy high, this was a joyful company number. Elisabeth helped lead one of the section’s most exuberant moments, while Lucy and Jessica showed a different side to their performances from their earlier solos.

Gilly Meek gave “The Winner Takes It All” her all, with a strong sense of musical theatre storytelling. George’s entrances and exits during the song were a slightly puzzling choice, as they drew attention away from her singing and the emotion she was creating. Keeping the focus more firmly on Gilly, or giving any movement a clearer dramatic purpose, would allow this performance to make an even greater impact.

Sophie Pope’s “I Have a Dream” provided a lovely return to the song that had opened the section. She sang with clarity, bringing the selection back to its starting point before the final burst of ensemble energy. It was a pleasing way to give the sequence a sense of shape.

“Waterloo” was full of fun, with lively choreography and an abundance of company enthusiasm. **Sharon Young** then led the “Money, Money, Money” sing-along with the ensemble and audience, sustaining that energy right to the end. Alongside her earlier performing contributions, this gave Sharon a spirited final moment on stage.

It was easy to understand why Mamma Mia! won the audience vote. Its warmth, familiar songs and sheer enjoyment proved a winning combination.

Direction, Music and Technical Presentation

Directors **Sharon Young** and **Matt Chishick** should be proud of the talent and enthusiasm they brought together. The concept gave the evening a clear identity and encouraged the audience to take an active part. For a future production, I’d suggest looking more closely at whether every character interaction is needed and what each one adds: fewer, more purposeful exchanges could strengthen the storytelling while keeping the competition moving.

Kev Harvey’s academic-style compère provided the opening explanation of the power of musicals and helped establish the framework for the evening. The role would benefit from a clearer connection to the competing superfans, with more responsive exchanges to help the characters feel part of the same story. His singing contributions showed how effectively he could also participate in the musical action.

Musical Director **Chris Cherng** made thoughtful choices in arranging and adapting songs to suit the performers. This was especially evident where familiar numbers were shaped around individual voices, allowing singers to offer their own interpretations. The arrangements were a strength, and further work on ensemble balance would help ensure that quieter vocal lines are heard as clearly as the more powerful ones.

Stage Manager **Sam Turner** supported a busy evening involving numerous performers and frequent changes of focus. The staging generally ran well, and the increasingly confident transitions helped maintain momentum.

Cate Naylor, Debbie Wheeler, Graham Smith and **Corinne Bowler**, responsible for wardrobe and props, made particularly effective use of colour. Green for Wicked, blue for Mamma Mia!, black and red for Les Misérables, and black and white for My Fair Lady gave each team an immediate visual identity. The latter was especially fitting, recalling the musical’s iconic Ascot imagery.

Lighting and sound were credited to **Matt Chishick, Chris Cherng, Patrick Naylor** and **Gary Pollington**. There were some very effective lighting choices, with colour reinforcing the different musical worlds and spotlights helping to focus attention and create tension where needed. Sound was generally clear, with no significant technical problems apparent; the occasional unevenness in vocal balance seemed more closely linked to the

shared microphone coverage and performers' positions, which could be refined through sound checks and rehearsal.

The choreography also deserves recognition. In particular, the lively Mamma Mia! company numbers made good use of the cast's enthusiasm and helped give the final section its audience-winning appeal.

Welcome and Wider Production Team

Thank you to the members and friends of SPT who provided such a warm front-of-house welcome. Their contribution helped make the afternoon feel friendly and inclusive, and it was lovely to see a full house bringing together younger and older audience members.

SPT offered an afternoon with plenty of heart, considerable vocal talent and a generous sense of shared enjoyment. With further development of the linking story and a little more consistency in the early transitions, this is a concept with room to become even stronger. There was much here for the company to celebrate.

Charlotte Gouldsmith-Leigh. NODA Representative London Region District 14