

Society : SPT Senior Youth Group
Production : Made in Dagenham
Date : 12th July
Venue : SPT
District : 14

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[Show Report](#)

Overview

Walking into Shinfield Players Theatre, I was greeted with the warm welcome that has become synonymous with SPT, and before a single note had been played, there was already a lovely sense of anticipation in the auditorium.

Made in Dagenham is an ambitious choice for any company, let alone a youth group. It asks a huge amount of its performers. The show requires strong acting, comedy, emotional depth, convincing accents, demanding vocals and a company capable of carrying a story rooted in real historical events. It also relies heavily on its ensemble, who are not simply there to fill the stage but are central to the storytelling throughout.

What struck me most during this production was the obvious affection the cast had for both the material and each other. This was a happy company of young performers doing something they genuinely loved. Their enthusiasm was infectious and their commitment never wavered. The opening factory scenes immediately established the world of 1968 Dagenham and were among my favourite moments of the evening. The energy from both the male and female ensemble was fantastic, creating a vibrant and believable workplace environment that set the tone beautifully. It was busy, characterful and full of life. In particular, the male ensemble numbers had tremendous energy and commitment, creating a real sense of the bustling Ford factory environment from the outset.

More importantly, this production reminded me why youth theatre is so important. It gives young people a safe space to be creative, to grow in confidence and to tell stories that matter. Looking around the stage during the finale, I couldn't help but feel incredibly optimistic about the future of amateur theatre.

Principal Cast and Performances

Rita O'Grady – Iona Forbes

Rita is the heart and soul of *Made in Dagenham* and Iona Forbes carried the responsibility of this demanding leading role with remarkable confidence and maturity. She beautifully captured Rita's journey from ordinary factory worker to passionate campaigner, making her instantly relatable and completely believable throughout.

Her Essex accent remained consistent, her vocals were strong and expressive, and she navigated the emotional highs and lows of the role with real sincerity. Most importantly, whenever she was on stage, my attention was naturally drawn to her. That is the mark of a strong leading performance and Iona should be tremendously proud of what she achieved.

Eddie O'Grady – Wilson Lang

Wilson Lang delivered a thoughtful and well-rounded portrayal of Eddie. He successfully balanced the character's frustrations, insecurities and underlying love for Rita, allowing us to understand all sides of the relationship.

His performance during "The Letter" was particularly moving and demonstrated a strong emotional connection to the material. As he continues his theatrical journey, I would encourage him to keep developing his vocal range and confidence. There is already something very promising there and with continued training he has every reason to be excited about the future.

Sharon O'Grady – Hannah Misselbrook

Hannah brought lovely youthful charm to Sharon. Her scenes felt natural and believable, helping establish the family dynamics that are so important to the story.

She displayed confidence on stage and delivered her moments with warmth and authenticity. A very likeable performance.

Graham O'Grady – Jess Shuttleworth

Jess gave Graham a believable innocence and youthful energy. The interactions within the O'Grady household felt genuine and helped ground the production emotionally.

A confident performance that contributed positively to the overall storytelling and family dynamic.

Beryl – Elizabeth Roscoe

What's not to love about Beryl? As somebody who occasionally lets the odd colourful word escape myself, I found Beryl instantly relatable.

Elizabeth Roscoe fully embraced the character's humour, confidence and larger-than-life personality. Her comic delivery was excellent and she created a wonderfully believable factory worker with a huge heart beneath the bravado. Elizabeth clearly possesses strong instincts as a character actress and I would encourage her to continue digging even deeper into character development because she already has an excellent foundation.

Clare – Lucy Bartle

Lucy Bartle brought great warmth and humour to Clare. Her comic timing worked particularly well during "Wosname" and she managed to make Clare endearing rather than simply forgetful.

Vocally she was very strong and her diction was consistently clear. She threw herself fully into the role and delivered a performance full of charm, personality and confidence.

Cass – Kyra Chaubey

Cass is often the sensible voice amongst the chaos and Kyra captured that quality very effectively. She brought a grounded and thoughtful presence to the group of machinists and worked well within the wider ensemble dynamic.

Her characterisation remained consistent throughout and she contributed positively to both the dramatic and musical moments. A solid and well-considered performance.

Sandra – Jemima Davy-Smith

Jemima was an absolute standout.

Quite simply, I could not take my eyes off her whenever she was on stage. She performed with extraordinary commitment, energy and presence. Every movement felt connected to the music, every scene felt alive, and she remained fully invested in character throughout. Watching her perform was genuinely exciting.

There is a natural musical theatre talent here that should be nurtured and developed because she has enormous potential. The emotion visible during the curtain call spoke volumes about how much this opportunity meant to her and it was lovely to witness.

Tracey – Emily Widdicombe

Emily brought enthusiasm and commitment to every moment she appeared on stage. She worked hard within both her principal and ensemble responsibilities and delivered her dialogue with confidence.

There is a clear stage presence developing here and I would encourage her to continue growing in confidence and exploring character choices even further.

Emma – Benita Veneables

Benita gave a focused and assured performance throughout. She integrated well within the company scenes and maintained strong engagement regardless of where she was positioned on stage. Her commitment never wavered and she should be proud of her contribution to the overall success of the production.

Jo – Beth Everied

Beth approached the role with enthusiasm and energy. She worked well alongside her fellow machinists and contributed strongly to the ensemble work throughout the evening.

As her confidence continues to grow, so too will the depth of her characterisation. There is already plenty of promise evident.

Barry / Gregory Hubble – Toby Childs

Toby took on multiple roles and approached them with enthusiasm and commitment. He was clearly enjoying himself on stage and maintained good characterisation throughout.

One area for development would be diction and clarity. This was something that occasionally affected a number of the male performers rather than Toby alone. Taking slightly more time with dialogue and ensuring every word lands clearly will strengthen future performances considerably. The enjoyment and commitment are already there.

Connie – Jessica Widdicombe

Jessica handled one of the show's most emotional storylines with impressive maturity. Connie's journey is deeply affecting and Jessica captured both her strength and vulnerability extremely well. I particularly enjoyed her scenes opposite Rita in the Berni Inn where her backstory emerged naturally and convincingly. To achieve that level of emotional depth at such a young age is highly commendable.

Monty / Mr Buckton / Chubby Chuff – Harrison Carpenter

Harrison was one of the strongest performers in the production. Playing several different roles, he ensured each character felt distinct and individual, which is testament to both his acting ability and preparation.

His confidence never tipped into over-confidence and his characterisation remained detailed throughout. If I were offering one small developmental note, it would be that Monty's grief following Connie's death could perhaps be pushed slightly further emotionally. It is a very minor point, but one that would elevate an already excellent performance even further.

Sid / Adams – Luca Sale

Luca brought tremendous enthusiasm to every appearance. He clearly loves performing and that enjoyment was infectious.

At times he could benefit from slowing down his delivery slightly to allow every line its full impact. Projection certainly wasn't an issue and with a little more control over pace he will become an even stronger performer.

Bill / Ron Macer – David Richardson

David delivered both roles with confidence and clarity. His diction was strong and he remained committed to character throughout.

I particularly enjoyed his work as Bill. Moving forward, I would encourage him to continue exploring physical characterisation and using his body even more as part of his performance toolkit.

Harold Wilson – Joseph Bailey

Joseph was an absolute delight.

Harold Wilson provides much of the show's political comedy and Joseph embraced every opportunity the role offered. His accent remained consistent, he used the stage confidently and effectively, and the audience clearly loved him.

Unlike some performers who can become rooted to one spot, Joseph utilised the entire performance space and brought real life to every appearance. He had excellent comic timing and created a wonderfully entertaining portrayal.

Civil Servants – Beth Everied, Emily Widdicombe & Benita Venables

This trio worked well together and delivered their scenes with confidence. Their harmonies and comic support for Harold Wilson helped strengthen those political sequences.

I would encourage all three to continue building confidence and pushing their characterisation further, but there is already plenty of promise on display.

Barbara Castle – Lucy Boardman

Barbara Castle requires authority, determination and strength. Lucy brought all three. Her accent remained consistent and her deadpan delivery worked particularly well. At times she appeared slightly nervous, especially during her solo work, but she needn't have been. The performance was strong. My encouragement would simply be to trust herself more, lift her chin and fully own the space. She absolutely earned her place there.

Lisa Hopkins – Amelie Newberry

Amelie delivered a thoughtful and intelligent portrayal of Lisa. She maintained the character's compassion and intelligence throughout and developed a believable friendship with Rita. Her scenes were understated in the best possible way and she made Lisa a genuinely likeable presence within the story.

Mr Hopkins – Charlie Clark

Charlie gave an excellent performance as the increasingly pressured Mr Hopkins. He captured the frustrations and anxieties of the role very effectively. His interactions with fellow cast members felt natural and believable and he maintained strong energy throughout.

Mr Tooley – Ben Smith

Ben was wonderfully unpleasant as Mr Tooley. Smarmy, arrogant and deeply unlikeable, exactly as the role requires. His performance of "This Is America" was full of confidence and presence, while his characterisation consistently made the audience uncomfortable in all the right ways.

The fact that he made my skin crawl slightly is probably one of the biggest compliments I can pay him.

Cortina Singer – Emily Widdicombe

Emily brought great energy and commitment to the memorable "Cortina" sequence. She clearly enjoyed the number and delivered it with confidence and enthusiasm. As her singing continues to develop, I would encourage her to focus on supporting from the diaphragm to add even greater strength and richness to her vocal delivery.

Ensemble

Ben Smith, Benita Venables, Freddie Hughes, Gabi Tešić, Hannah Hillier, Naomi Sutton and Ruby Adamson should all be extremely proud of their contributions.

The ensemble worked tirelessly throughout the performance. They maintained character, brought excellent energy and created the world of the production with commitment and enthusiasm. The opening factory sequences and many of the larger company numbers simply would not have been as successful without their efforts.

Creative Team and Production

The creative team should be immensely proud of what they achieved here.

Director **Gordon Bird** had the considerable challenge of bringing together a large youth company, tackling a demanding piece of theatre and running two casts. The result was a production full of energy, strong characterisation and genuine heart. The principal performances were particularly well developed and the storytelling remained clear throughout.

If there is one area to continue developing, it would be encouraging some of the smaller supporting roles to dig even deeper into their character journeys. However, that comes with confidence and experience, and there was already plenty of evidence of both.

Assistant Directors **Sarah Beth Lockwood** and **Callum Maskell** clearly played an important role in creating a supportive rehearsal environment and helping these young performers flourish.

Rachel Lockwood deserves enormous credit both as Producer and Musical Director. Vocally, the company sounded excellent. The female harmonies in particular were a real highlight of the evening and helped elevate the overall standard considerably. **Lara Savory** provided valuable support as Assistant Musical Director.

Millie Wilkins' choreography was energetic, impactful and perfectly suited to the company. The routines remained engaging throughout and reflected the spirit of the show beautifully. Credit also goes to Assistant Choreographers **Amelie Newberry** and **Benita Venables**, along with Dance Captains **Amelie Newberry, Benita Venables, Jemima Davy-Smith** and **Wilson Lang** for maintaining consistency and energy throughout the run.

Sarah Beth Lockwood's work as Rehearsal Pianist was clearly reflected in the confidence of the cast. The band, consisting of **Sarah Beth Lockwood (Keyboard 1), Chris Cherng (Keyboard 2), Martin Carrick (Drums), Gary Pollington (Guitar), Charlie Black (Bass) and Mark Richardson (Saxophone)**, provided excellent musical support throughout. The balance between orchestra and cast was exceptionally well judged, meaning lyrics and dialogue were consistently clear.

Stage Manager **Sam Turner** and Stage Crew lead **Karen Bird** ensured everything ran smoothly. I particularly enjoyed watching members of the youth company assist with scene changes. One thought for future productions would be to consider reducing some of the blackouts. With performers already in character moving scenery and props, transitions could potentially happen in view of the audience, increasing pace and maintaining momentum.

Peter Ashton's Lighting and Sound Design was thoughtful, effective and well executed. The technical elements enhanced the storytelling without ever distracting from it. **Gordon Bird** as Lighting Operator and **Myles Levy** as Sound Operator ensured everything was delivered consistently and professionally.

The costumes, created by **Eloise Seery, Lara Savory, Cate Naylor, Rachel Lockwood, SPT Wardrobe and CMP Wardrobe**, were outstanding. They immediately established the period and significantly enhanced the authenticity of the production.

Properties by **Gordon Bird, Derek Lockwood and SPT** demonstrated wonderful attention to detail. Small touches such as cereal in bowls, milk in jugs, filled glasses and practical household items may seem minor, but they help create a believable world and elevate a production enormously.

Peter Ashton's Set Design was simple but highly effective. The flexibility of the staging and the clever use of different performance areas allowed scenes to flow naturally. Congratulations also to the Set Construction team of **Clive Dolby, Di Capel, Natalie Clark, Peter Ashton, Sam Turner, Tim Howling and Yvonne Mitchell** for bringing the design to life.

The programme, created by **Gordon Bird and Lara Savory**, deserves special mention. Not only was it beautifully presented, but the historical information surrounding the Ford Dagenham strike was genuinely educational and added real value to the audience experience. Do consider entering it into the NODA programme competition.

Rachel Lockwood, as Chaperone Co-Ordinator, alongside all the parents and theatre members who served as chaperones, also deserve recognition. Youth theatre simply doesn't happen without the support of dedicated volunteers.

Finally, a special thank you to the **Front of House team**. The welcome was warm, friendly and professional and helped create a positive experience from the moment audience members arrived.

Final Thoughts

Theatre isn't just about perfect notes, flawless choreography or getting every line exactly right. It's about bringing people together, telling stories and creating memories. This production achieved all of those things.

The story of the Ford Dagenham women remains every bit as relevant today as it was in 1968, and this talented group of young performers told that story with passion, humour, heart and conviction. What impressed me most was not simply the quality of the performances, although there was much to admire, but the obvious joy that radiated from the stage. The cast supported one another, celebrated one another and worked together as a true company.

As the curtain came down and the cast took their well-earned bows, there was a genuine sense of pride visible on stage. In truth, that pride was entirely justified.

Thank you to everyone involved, both on stage and behind the scenes, for an enjoyable and uplifting evening. Productions like this remind us all why community theatre matters and why its future remains in very safe hands.

It was a pleasure to spend the evening with you all. Well done.

Charlotte Gouldsmith-Leigh. NODA Representative London Region District 14