The Rosebowl Awards for Amateur Drama and Music

Fame

Conceived and Developed by David de Silva

Presented by BMYP

Adjudicated by Rebecca Thompson

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Updated from the original ‘80s film, Fame the musical follows the lives of dancers, musicians and actors at the PA....

Presentation

Excellent use of the stage here, you built a set that strongly evoked the rehearsal room yet left plenty of space for the action. Wood-effect wall flats marked the interior. These were appropriately decorated in notices and the PA slogan. Piano was well-placed in terms of allowing actors to ‘play’ authentically, although occasionally delivery was lost a little due to the upstage positioning. The under-stage construction for the drums was eye-catching and moved efficiently. The steps to the higher level created impact in blocking and allowed for the authority of the staff to be established at key moments. Exits were strongly positioned. Excellent construction and placing of taxi for finale.

Overall the decor was that of a well-used, much-loved but rather unkempt rehearsal room. Well done.

Stage management was very efficient.

Costume

An eclectic and colourful array of youthful outfits established the drama school ‘uniform’: dungarees, short skirts, shorts, knee-high socks and tracksuits fitted the exuberance and creativity of the students. Individual characters were pointed effectively – Schlomo’s coloured blazers, Nick’s preppy look, Tyrone’s collection of ‘slogan’ t-shirts and the flamboyant, skin-tight outfits of Carmen – all contributed to a well-thought through and coherent costume design. Subtle changes were made as characters matured...Schlomo’s increased relaxation was marked by a beanie hat and Nick and Serena’s outfits were both less formal by the final act. Carmen’s grey joggers and sloppy top provided an impactful contrast at the end.

Ms Bell sported a wide range of dance outfits and Ms Sherman attire was suitably ‘sharp.’ I felt there could have been a bit more creativity in terms of the male teachers though – they were too similar.

Ensemble wore a wide range of dance outfits – the black and red concept for the flamenco routine was particularly striking. Academic gowns and mortar boards were colourful and inventively created.

Lighting/FX

Effective range of tones set the mood for the varying numbers – the striking red light at the end of Tyrone’s number and the very attractive dappled effect during the ballet for example. Warm light captured the interior; scene changes were marked with a wonderfully dramatic upstage effect contributing to the sense of theatre. Cues were very well-timed.

On stage amplification was clear and unobtrusive.

Direction

As a forerunner to High School Musical and Glee, Fame offers a grittier analysis of life as a performing arts student. Conflict amongst staff, hi-jinks and heartache amongst students are the ‘norm’, but this show also throws in the brutal consequences of a young person seeking fame at all cost. This harsh, albeit thin, storyline is set amidst a showcase of performances from all disciplines, demanding a high standard from every member of the cast.

From the onset we were drawn into the intensity of life at PA; the whirlwind of auditions effectively introduced the talents and personalities of the leads and we were immediately launched into their world of ‘hard work’. The nonstop schedule and imposing expectation of the staff set a convincing atmosphere of drama school. The pace never faltered as the very episodic action was driven by energetic delivery, excellent transition from score to lib and intuitive blocking that enabled players to enter as the previous scene was concluding. It was exhausting to watch – and rightly so! I would just say, and I am sure that this was because this performance was early in your run, at times the show was a little too driven and players rushed lines and movement to the detriment of pointing mood and character. The American feel-good atmosphere was a little flat initially as well and despite the consistent accent, the requisite suffocating optimism and grit of these young performers became somewhat British....however, as players settled, personalities were established and by the second act individuals started to fill the shoes of their characters effectively. This was evident in the very rounded portrayal of their maturity, as their time at PA came to an end.

Despite the gritty undertone, the overall storyline for Fame is light....but what you were given you handled well. Excellent establishment of growing relationship between the leads – particularly Nick and Serena and so beautifully portrayed by Tyrone and Iris – helped us identify with the journey of these young students. The sensitively-pointed portrayal of Carmen’s demise was outstanding, and again highlighted the pathos so that our emotions were engaged. These young players also communicated the difference between student and teacher very well indeed, contributing to the authenticity of the school.

Ultimately however, this is a showcase of the performing arts. Quite a challenge for an amateur group to take on because these students are meant to be ‘La Crème de la Crème’...you are blessed with some strong singers at the moment and the leads and ensemble presented the numbers with utter commitment and enthusiasm. Acting was strong too, not only among leads but many lovely moments of reaction and engagement contributed to the atmosphere in this hothouse environment. The dance routines are probably the most challenging aspect, but you are to be commended on the range of style and the achievement in directing a ‘mixed’ group of performers to present these styles with such understanding and focus.

Musical Direction

Very strong support from a well-directed yet unobtrusive band. Ensemble singing was, as always with this company, tight and on the whole very well-articulated. Strong leads captured the range of characters. A few found the combination of dance and projection of song challenging at times, but full marks for utter commitment to such complex song and dance routines. The atmosphere of a performing arts college was definitely created in terms of focus and enthusiasm, although somehow the exuberance and aspiration of the title song – ‘Fame’- was never quite fulfilled.

Choreography

Such energy and commitment was on show here. The group numbers had been choreographed with appropriately fast-paced, rhythmic and repetitive movements, firmly presenting the idea of the school’s ensemble. Complementing these, was the range of styles and moods which encapsulated the diversity of talent and buzz of the PA environment. What was notable too was that you not only presented a range of style, but clearly understood the tone and intent of some of the key numbers. Ensemble numbers were, on the whole, disciplined – just a few shaky moments in the clapping rhythm and some uneven upper body lines for the more energetic numbers, but this is quibbling. I was very impressed with the ingenuity of movement in the group numbers – the ‘Hard Work’ reprise, including so many lifts and the wonderful tongue-in-cheek US references in Mabel’s solo, are both notable examples. The tightly-blocked flamenco was very striking; the requisite intensity was not fully captured here in terms of control and facial expression, but the overall effect and disciplined use of fans, was both atmospheric and striking. I also loved the final dance between Tyrone and Iris; such a wonderful combination of classical and contemporary – this dance told the story of their relationship far better than any dialogue. Beautifully and sensitively performed by both dancers. Tyrone’s street dance was a wonderful lift in the first half – locking and popping effectively on show here, and the physicality and acrobatics of the dancers are to be commended.

Playing

Nick Piazza

Very strong characterisation here, you presented the commitment of a young actor with great clarity. Focussed timing of lines and an innate connection with the dialogue enabled you to present the journey of this intelligent, intuitive performer. Lovely rapport with Serena and an effortless delivery of song completed this very polished performance.

Serena Katz

Again, there was great maturity in this portrayal. Serena’s naivety was pointed with affection, but never became comic (and rightly so.) Like Nick, you captured the commitment to your training and in your short acting scenes, managed to convey the intensity and purpose of creating a role and wanting to impress. Very intelligent depiction of Serena’s maturity and the connection with Nick was heart-warming. Your tender, beautifully pitched and articulated delivery of ‘Let’s Play a Love Song,’ was a highlight for me. Very well done.

Joe Vegas

The comedian was strongly portrayed in both vocal and movement. There was an appealing energy here that presented a very different type of acting student. Some impactful use of voice and accent, strong, reactive playing and an overall warmth brought this character alive. Just be careful, however, that in your desire to present Joe’s upbeat, hi-energy character, clarity of both lib and lyric is not undermined.

Carmen Diaz

You presented a very strong physicality from your first entrance. Sexy and charismatic, the portrayal of the Latin exhibitionist was complemented by a very strong singing vocal. You rightly created a strong point of focus on the stage. Lovely swagger as you walked and also a sense of the enigma beneath the mask. Your later portrayal of Carmen’s downfall was both shocking and touching. Excellent understatement here and a very moving physicality presented the sobering picture of an addict.

Schlomo

A strong evocation of the music geek was presented; his rather downtrodden personality captured the boy desperately seeking to escape the fame of his virtuoso parents. This was complemented by a touching depiction of his attraction to Carmen. An intelligent delivery that went some way to encapsulate both background and personality – just be careful that vocal is not too understated, particularly in upstage moments.

Goody

Strong physical energy here, and your live playing really lifted the production!

Lambchops

Quirky and reactive, your ease on stage is very apparent. You contributed to the practice scenes with energy and enthusiasm and also in terms of your focus and strong movement in the ensemble numbers.

Iris Kelly

A beautifully–poised physicality helped you present the dancer. As mentioned earlier, you presented the clash and connection with Tyrone very tenderly in both movement and dialogue. Just be careful to utilise your full range in spoken delivery – the pitch was a little even at times.

Tyrone Jackson

Again, a high-energy performance that was compelling in terms of dance and facial play. You committed to every line and movement and shone in your solo numbers. Sensitive portrayal of the dyslexia...but this was slightly undermined by the uneven presentation of the rebel. You could have built on the innate anger and frustration of Tyrone to create an even fuller picture of a boy not at ease in his own skin.

Mabel

Your performance was another highlight for me. You are a very watchable player and you brought sunshine to the stage every time you entered! Such an endearing portrayal of the dancer who struggles with her diet and your lament was outstanding. Very attractive and unforced vocal with excellent communication of comedy here.

Ms Bell

Very focussed performance, your poise as a dancer was consistent as was your evident dedication to your students. There was a lovely sense of your leading your pupils in the dances and the tension with Ms Sherman was evident. Your commitment to Tyrone was very clearly portrayed in the challenging pitching of ‘The Teacher’s Argument.’

Ms Sherman

Such maturity here, you created an older woman with poise and confidence. Strong cueing and very firm articulation gave you a sense of authority. I just wondered whether you could have been even firmer initially so that your increased softening towards Tyrone and ultimate confession in ‘These are my Children’ became even more impactful. Very strong singing vocal here – what a range!

Mr. Myers

A clear portrayal of the attentive teacher, your focus contributed to the overall polish of the production. I know it seems stereotypical, but a slightly stronger personality and less conventional dress would have enhanced this performance a little,I think.

Mr. Sheinkopf

There was an effective sense of intensity and oblivion in your portrayal of the classical music teacher.

The rest of the cast

Strong support from every player – and lovely to see such an age-range in this youth production.

Thank you for your warm welcome and kind hospitality.