



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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Supporting live theatre in South Australia

PO Box 738
MODBURY SA 5092

info@theatreguide.com.au
ABN : 93 297 960 525

PRISCILLA QUEEN OF THE DESERT – THE MUSICAL

Murray Bridge Players and Singers

Murray Bridge Town Hall

Until 18 September 2021

Review by Brendan Watts

"Priscilla" is the second show presented by the Murray Bridge Players and Singers in 2021, following a sell-out season of "Mamma Mia!" in May. Director Mari Reu has utilised her extensive experience to bring to life a vibrant and authentic show, worthy of holding the title of the SA amateur premiere production of this title.

As with other companies, this production has been hit with multiple covid related issues, including but not limited to lockdown reduced rehearsal periods and the omission of a cast member to quarantine one day before opening. The cast and crew have shown great resilience to overcome these hurdles and produce a show that remains engaging and genuine. (Their acknowledgement of the missing cast member (Lorelle Barton) through strategically placed appearances of her image throughout the show was a touching reminder of the impacts that Covid can have on us all).

For those unfamiliar with the plot, it is based on the 1994 hit film "The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert", following the journey of two drag queens and a transgender woman: Tick, Felicia and Bernadette as they travel from Sydney to Alice Springs aboard the titular bus Priscilla.

From the moment that Miss Understanding (Peta Davis) welcomes us to the Cockatoo Club, right until the final bows, we are drawn into the quintessential Australian landscape and mannerisms.

The staging is both simple but effective, overcoming the inevitable loss of space (to accommodate the bus) by utilising the thrust and remaining stage area wisely. Although limited in number, the design team have spared no glitter or sparkle to ensure that the stage still shines.

If the set is simple, the costumes are far from being described in the same manner. Since her arrival to the company in 2016, the costume creations of Samantha Pope have continued to have that "wow factor". The efforts of her team have again been nothing short of outstanding, with every scene being eye-catching due to the dynamic and vibrant costumes worn by the cast. From frill-necked lizards and cockatoos to famous Australian icons like Kath and Kim, the diversity of the skill employed in their construction astounds. Well done to all involved! The only thing more amazing than the skill in their construction, was the ability of the cast to change from one to another so quickly and so often (given the limited space side of stage at this venue).

As in most of their recent productions the band, led by Benjamin Gallasch, are again located below the stage and we were treated to their talents through the magic of technology. Each tune was instantly recognisable and certainly got our feet tapping along.

The choreography was spread between several people, and this allowed there to be little repetition from one scene to the next, keeping each fresh and vibrant.

The three main characters Tick/Mitzi (Kurt Miegel), Felicia/Adam (Trent Baker) and Bernadette (Max Rayner) were acted to perfection, with each character fitting each other like a glove.



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The vocal skills of Kurt Miegel are well known locally, having previously filled the roles of Billy Flynn ("Chicago") and Fiyero ("Wicked") amongst others. His performance in "Priscilla" brings the same depth of characterisation and believability.

Likewise, Trent Baker brought the character of Felicia Jollygoodfellow to life through his facial expressions, body language and voice. The crowd was mesmerised by his lip-synching performance during "Sempre Libera", but that may have also been due in no small part to the flawless delivery of the lyrics by Sparklin White (Prue Cartledge).

Although new to the Murray Bridge Players and Singers' family, Max Rayner still brings a lot of theatre experience to the role of Bernadette. His comedic timing was excellent, creating a depth of character to the role that drew you in.

Anyone that has participated in the cast of a musical knows the complexity that comes from balancing the different singing parts, and the Divas (Breigh Angove, Prue Cartledge, Joanne Ahrens and Cassie Brion) demonstrated this to perfection. It was even more amazing to learn that they had had to readjust vocally only 24hrs before opening night due to losing the remaining Diva to quarantine. Truly a versatile and talented group of individuals!

They were supported admirably by those in the minor roles, with Peta Davis (Miss Understanding) encouraging the audience to release their inner Tina Turner, Robyn Bates (Shirley) channelling her inner bogan and Katelin Kneebone (Marion) bringing a wholesome inner glow and warmth to the familial subplot. Timothy Hodgen and Alex Pfeiffer contributed robust humour as Lars and countless other small roles. Newcomers Don Watts (Bob) and Ledja Gray (Benji) also gave convincing performances in their respective roles, delivering their lines confidently.

A special mention must be made of the memorable performances of Hamish Plummer (Farrah) and Nikki Madula (Cynthia), as both provided authentic and passionate characters that the audience connected with immediately.

The discipline and variety of characters created by the remaining ensemble, made the stage a sea of engaging images for the audience to indulge in. The depth of sound that washed over the audience when the full cast was in song, was rich and emotive. It was clear to see that everyone was enjoying themselves.

A "language warning" is provided at the start of the show in a jocular fashion, so "don't say that you weren't warned".

With seats selling quickly, you will need to get in fast in order not to miss a truly vibrant and entertaining evening.