



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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Supporting live theatre in South Australia

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LES MISÉRABLES

Northern Light Theatre Company

Shedley Theatre

Until 9th April 2022

Review by Lance Jones

In 1862, French author Victor Hugo finally published a work that had taken him around twenty years to complete. Widely regarded as one of the greatest novels of all time, "Les Misérables" (literally translated as "The Miserable Ones") is set during a tumultuous period in the history of France's 19th Century ebb and flow between constitutional monarchies and republics, and their accompanying rebellions, in particular, the "Insurrection R publicaine   Paris" ("The Paris Uprising") in June 1832. The novel is a deeply nuanced work, spread out over several books filled with numerous simultaneous narratives examining the morality, and often hopelessness associated with the human condition. The musical adaptation of the novel premiered in Paris in 1980 and has been a much-loved staple of musical theatre around the globe ever since.

The challenge with "Les Mis" has always been to capture the deep, brooding mood of the novel within the music and the performances. The sheer emotional breadth of Les Mis has always demanded the very best in stagecraft so as to do Hugo's novel justice. Northern Light Theatre Company's 2022 production of "Les Mis" has managed to deliver this to a standard that sets a new benchmark in the performance of this much-loved musical.

Director Gordon "Gordie" Coombes boldly went for chunky, robustly built sets lit with brown-hued, shadowy streetlamps in what seemed to be a deliberate statement protesting against the oft used projections and technical shortcuts we see nowadays. These surreal provocations and deliberately caressed emotions evoked what has now possibly become his signature. The ever-so-familiar score was beautifully performed under the musical direction of Matthew Rumley, while Sue Pole's choreography captured the moods of menace and desperation this squalid period in French history demands.

Yet it was the formidable talent on display that made this season of Les Mis the triumph that it was. This show was incredibly well cast. Adelaide theatre aficionados would have noted the impressive list of local performers gracing the stage at The Shedley Theatre. The ensemble brimmed with talent, many of whom are experienced lead actors themselves. Having such veterans as Gus Smith, Chaney Hoffmann, Graham Loveday, Nadine Wood, Sandy Wandel, Sanjay Mohanaraj, Sarah Wildy, Steve Lewis, Trevor Anderson, Karen Muller and Wendy Rayner on the ensemble roster is testimony to the depth of talent this production enjoyed.

The principal protagonists were exquisitely interpreted by two Adelaide theatre icons. Mark Oates is simply born to play the role of Jean Valjean and just gets better each time he graces the stage. David MacGillivray gave us an excellent Javert, displaying the sheer talent and versatility he manages to maintain at a consistently exceptional standard. Nicholas Munday showed Adelaide Theatregoers he has "arrived" with a well delivered Marius, combining wonderfully with Tasmin McGill's lovely vocal ability as Cosette. Kate Hodges as Fantine gave us a splendid rendition of the classic "I Dreamed a Dream", while Billy St John was a good, solid choice as the student leader Enjolras.

James McClusky-Garcia teamed up with Megan Humphries to bring us the Thenadiers. Megan's Madam Thenardier would be one of the best you may ever get to see, while James showed us a quite different



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version of the comedic depravity that his character deserved. Keep an eye out for newcomer Lilianna Carletti who gave us a passionate and loving Éponine, and young Harrison Thomas as the cheeky Gavroche. These two young people are going places.

Staging *Les Misérables* is always a big ask. It is a timeless classic that does the rounds every few years. Indeed, über-experienced ensemble member Wendy Rayner has now performed in seven productions of *Les Mis* over a period of twenty-one years! It's multitude of fans expect a very high standard, and the Northern Light Theatre Company's 2022 production delivers exactly that.

The well-deserved standing ovations signalled a new benchmark of excellence in the performance of this classic and timeless musical.