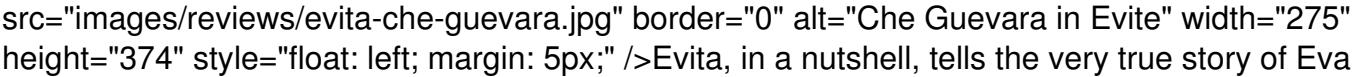


 Evita at [Lowry Theatre](http://www.thelowry.com/) Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) March 2017

On this night of a thousand stars, let me take you to Evita's door. If proof is needed that Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Tom Rice made one of the world's greatest Musical Theatre writing partnerships, then look no further than **Bill Kenwright**'s production of Evita, currently on a Rainbow Tour, and at The Lowry in Salford until the end of this week.

This was a masterclass in Musical Theatre. Well, if I wanted to really nit-pick I could - the set was noisy taking its position, the stage hands were visible moving it, and the follow spots were somewhat problematic - but these things really are nothing more than me trying to find fault with an otherwise faultless production.

From the opening bars you knew this was going to be true to the original concept, which it was; and that the direction (**Bob Tomson** and **Bill Kenwright**) was both tight and imaginative, evoking the era and mood superbly with help from **Bill Deamer**'s lovely and authentic-looking choreography, and **David Steadman**'s solid Musical Direction. I would have preferred more from the solo drum riffs in Dangerous Jade; but that is just a personal wish.

 Evita, in a nutshell, tells the very true story of Eva Duarte, a young girl from a poor family in the 'outback' of Argentina, who eventually becomes Colonel Peron's mistress and then wife and first lady of Argentina. It's the classic poor-girl-makes-good story with plots and intrigue a-plenty along the way. The show starts where it ends; at Eva's funeral. Not the usual opening and closing for a Musical you may think - and you'd be right; but this is not an ordinary Musical. This Musical also uses a narrative device in the form of Che Guevara, an Argentinian Marxist Revolutionary, who reacts and interacts with the cast as he develops the plot. It's a highly political statement but one that works wonderfully.

Emma Hatton brought a freshness and immediacy to the role of Eva Peron, and her undeniable skills as actress, singer and dancer brought Evita (the affectionate nickname she was given) truly to life. Her development from a young, eager-eyed backstreet girl, through to scheming prostitute-cum-actress, to finally holding sway as Argentina's mature and confident First Lady was superbly placed, and her rendition of 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina', was perfect. No less a talent came in the form of newcomer to the English stage, **Gian Marco Schiaretto**, whose sardonic and malevolent interpretation of Che was her perfect foil and his omnipresence, dark and brooding. Excellently measured and superbly sung.

Surprisingly for a Press Night, the third lead was performed by the understudy; and so **George Arvidson** stepped into Colonel Peron's shoes this evening; and apart from him looking too young for the part, proved that he was indeed more than worthy of those shoes! A beautifully controlled voice, and a rather stiff and polite gait made him the polar opposite of the scheming and chaotic run-around of Eva, and they do say that opposites attract.

In smaller but significant roles, **Oscar Balmaseda** hammed up his cameo of the tango singer Magaldi by just the right amount; any more and it would have been a caricature, but he played it very sensibly still as a real person, and this worked very much in his favour; and **Sarah O'Connor** sang 'Another Suitcase In Another Hall' as Peron's mistress with a clarity of

voice I have heard only in a handful of singers thus far. It was simply breathtakingly beautiful, and combining this with the ever-so-quiet beautiful harmonies of the male backing chorus made it my personal show highlight.

With an excellent and strong ensemble, including children from local Stagecoach Schools, this was a wonderful and highly evocative and emotive presentation. Personally I would have preferred to have seen all the children sing Santa Eva, not just the one young girl even though she did sing it extremely well; but again, that is just a personal choice, not a criticism of the show.

The only other thing I would say, is that, because one of the ensemble men had been taken out of the equation to play Peron, some of the songs and choreographies didn't work perhaps quite as well as they would have done had that extra person been there. This was nowhere more noticeable than in The Art Of The Possible. That ominous and empty chair did look very conspicuous.

Evita, nevertheless, is a sure-fire hit. Not only her, but the whole show is a diamond.