



[Sunset Boulevard](#) at Palace Theatre
Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) October 2017

Writing reviews for shows which are practically perfect are always much more difficult somehow because they can come across as sycophantic and gushing rather than genuine. Therefore I am warning the reader now, this review is neither sycophantic nor gushing but completely heartfelt and genuine. I was totally blown away by this show!

Presented by **Michael Harrison** and **David Ian**, this was a **Curve Production** of one of Andrew Lloyd Webber's more mature scores based on Billy Wilder's film of the same name,

Sunset Boulevard

. It tells the story of a starving screenplay writer escaping from the debt collector 'heavies' by driving down Sunset Boulevard and turning into a private driveway. The lady of the house he has driven to mistakes him for the funeral director for her pet chimpanzee, and as he recognises her as a star of the silent films, they begin a relationship which sees him employed by her to

help her with a screenplay which she will star in for her comeback.

She is a lonely, forgotten star, pushed aside when she was unable to make the transition from silent films, and he feels sad that her life has come to this. She falls in love with him, he goes along with it since he needs both her money and her kindness. All seems to be working out fine until she, in uncontrolled jealousy, finds out that he has been spending a lot of time with a young employee of the studio and of course it doesn't end well for any of them.

Touring shows don't often push the boat out, and producers are always trying to find ways of cutting costs etc. I guess this is both understandable and unavoidable even if it is disappointing for audiences. However, for once, this production employed a live 16-piece orchestra which sounded superb under the direction of **Adrian Kirk**, a large and talented ensemble, and rather than relying on 'star name' casting took the brave plunge of filling the main roles with performers who were actually Musical Theatre trained and able to play these roles, and this paid dividends a thousand fold.

The main role of faded movie star Norma Desmond was played by **Ria Jones** who totally embodied the role. Her singing and performance skills were second to none and commanded the stage with her electrifying presence. Utterly stunning and totally believable. Playing opposite her as the writer Joe Gillis was no less a talent

Danny Mac

, looking every inch the Matinee Idol but totally believable and sincere. Betty Schaefer, the young studio employee who writes a screenplay together with Joe and falls in love with him was the delightful

Molly Lynch

, and the young man Betty is engaged to - Artie Green, played by

Dougie Carter

. However the supporting role which, for me, made the show, was an incredibly well-measured

and sincere performance by an actor with a surprising vocal range of depth and clarity. Playing Norma's only employee, a self-styled butler-cum-valet, was the stern-faced ex-husband / director Max Von Meyeling,

Adam Pearce

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The set was a film studio space which, using stage hands was moved and manipulated for each scene with camera rolling at the side and the whole effect was that this was all just part of one big movie production. It was a nice idea and it worked excellently. The only thing I would suggest is that some of the projections used in certain scenes - especially the car chase and swimming pool - were a little out of focus for those sitting very close to the stage like myself. They may well have been clear further back but sadly some of the images were blurred where I was sitting. However, since everything else about this show was absolutely spot on and wonderful, I can overlook this.

I rarely applaud after the end of each song in Musicals, preferring to watch the story unfold unhindered and uninterrupted and then applaud at the end. However this evening was an exception for me, I was applauding heartily at the end of every song, and was one of the first on my feet at the end to give the whole company a much deserved standing ovation. If you only go to one Musical a year, I urge you to choose this, you will not be disappointed.