Something Wonderful at Hope Mill Theatre

Reviewed by Matthew Dougall March 2016

Something Wonderful, subtitled '***A Celebration of Rodgers And Hammerstein***', this was a musical concert revue of some of the pair's more well known music at Manchester's newest and loveliest Fringe Theatre,
Hope Mill Theatre
in Ancoats.

The stage was decorated in purple curtains and chaise-longue with candles and fairy-lights, and the music played on an onstage piano by the Musical Director of the event George Francis. It was a very cosy and intimate setting but also gave an illusion of opulence and timelessness.

There were four principal singers, all hailing from the world of Musical Theatre, and either as solos or in combinations of the four sang songs from ***The King And I***, ***Carousel***, ***The Sound Of Music*** , ***South Pacific*** and ***Oklahoma!*** , with only a couple of surprises form lesser known Musicals. Personally I would have preferred to have heard a few more forgotten gems, but as it was, it served as a lovely introduction to their music for anyone (if there is anyone) unfamiliar with them. The evening was directed by **Sally Rapier** .

The four also took turns at being compere, and along with simply announcing the names of the songs they spoke a little about the background to the composition and added a few personal anecdotes along the way. A nice touch.

For me, the one with the most melodious and sonorous voice, and perhaps also the best stage presence was **Michael Fletcher**. The three other soloists, no less capable, were **Emily Chesterton** , **Sharon Byatt** and **James Lacey**

. The latter having a more than obvious fondness for
The Sound Of Music
, as he started the show with a touching and slightly humorous parody of Julie Andrews singing 'I Have Confidence', complete with guitar case and bag. We even had the famous hand-on-head-and-point-to-the-sky pose at the end (which Julie Andrews does with the children in the film at the end of Do Re Mi). He also managed, at end the show, a very short passage from the Musical, despite the song being '
Shall We Dance
'!

The evening's highlight though was, without doubt, the silliest, most irreverent version of '*I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out Of My Hair*
' ever, which saw the two men ham it and camp it up for all it's worth, and involved not only the other two soloists but the chorus of 6 students from
Rare Studio
, who had a couple of songs which they sang themselves and sang chorus for a few others.

The finale to Act 1 was '*Goodbye*' from The Sound Of Music, and Act 2 finished with the title song from *Oklahoma*! Despite the latter being the better chorus song and packing a greater punch, simply on lyrics alone, surely they should have been the other way around?

It would have been a really fabulous evening's musical entertainment but for two things. The first is easy to write about - Miss Byatt's voice was sadly quite flat in the latter part of the second half. I don't quite understand what the problem was since she was fine up until then, but the last few songs she sung were distinctly not hitting the note I am sorry to report.

However, that pales into insignificance when writing about the lighting - or lack of it! I have absolutely no idea what the LX designer / operator thought they were doing but quite frankly a five-year-old child could have done better. Soloists were left in the dark, the lights seemed to have a life of their own and go on and off quite arbitrarily, even being switched off mid-song. The full wash didn't cover the whole stage and left strange shadows and black spots; the lamps seemed to be set at different strengths and so sometimes half a face was brighter lit than the other half; and many other incongruences. It totally spoilt the enjoyment of the evening. Such a shame.