

Powerful Performances Lift *Les Miz*

Huntington's Different Stages Theater ends its freshman season with the beloved musical *Les Misérables*. The musical is based on the Victor Hugo novel about an ex-con who gains redemption after breaking parole, stealing silver from a bishop and being entrusted by the bishop to use the silver to turn his life around. He changes his identity, adopts an orphan girl and is constantly pursued by a law officer hell-bent on justice, no matter how morally unjust it might be. The story has been compared to Charles Dickens' holiday classic, *A Christmas Carol*. In both, the protagonist has lost faith in humanity, but a small, underprivileged child helps them recover their belief in goodness and love.

This production promised an intimate setting with strong, professional voices and acting, and youthful passion for the show. It does not disappoint.

The performers faced a number of obstacles on opening night. In addition to being a technically challenging production with nonstop singing, constant movement, stage combat and lots and lots of wigs, there were sound balance issues and a small, quiet (albeit appreciative) audience. The audience was hesitant to applaud, even after numbers that were designed to allow them to, but this did not seem to dampen the cast's enthusiasm or energy.

Landon Sholar is a perfect Jean Valjean. Last summer, according to his program bio, he became the youngest actor to play the role as a professional. This is his third time in the role, and he completely embodies the aging, beleaguered ex-con who turns away from God and back again. More than any other actor in the show, Sholar seems to connect directly with the audience.

Robert Teasdale is likewise perfect as



Curtain Call

JENNIFER POIRY-PROULX

his foil, Inspector Javert. Tall and imposing, Teasdale brings a touching vulnerability to Javert, who suffers from a tragic sense of justice. He speak-sings the beginning of his song "Stars," but as the number progresses, the lines become longer and more powerful as Javert becomes more resolute in his conviction that he is who he is. No matter the cost, he must punish Valjean for his crimes.

Particularly passionate in his role is

LES MISERABLES

7:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays
thru December 19

1:30 & 7:30 p.m. Saturdays
thru December 20

6 p.m. Sundays thru December 21

Different Stages Theater
528 N. Jefferson St., Huntington
Tix.: \$ 44-\$ 59, 260-454-0603
www.different-stages.com

Charlie Tingen as the student revolutionary Enjolras. He is operatic and almost too intense for such a small stage, but as a leader who convinces a bunch of privileged "schoolboys" to give their lives for the rights of the oppressed poor, the elevated performance is appropriate.

Melissa Weyn and Brooke Anne Quintana as Fantine and Eponine respectively, have beautiful, rich voices. Raynah Tyler plays Young Cosette. She is tiny and adorable but sings her solo "Castle on a Cloud"

with poise and professionalism, especially for someone so young

Raynah Tyler played Young Cosette on opening night (she alternates with another young actress, Naomi Vincenti). Amelia Story plays the little boy Gavroche with spunk and perfect comedic timing. She got one of the show's biggest laughs on opening night during a confrontation with Javert. But the biggest laughs rightly go to the story's comedic villains, the Thernardiers. Played by Matt Hill and the show's choreographer Erin Baltzar, the duo are gleefully and deliciously evil.

The entire ensemble is strong, with everyone having their moments to shine. British accents were used well by the cast with varying dialects by the different classes. The men's chorus were difficult to understand during the prologue, partly due to overly loud orchestration, but the women's diction was, collectively, impeccable. The student revolutionaries have a believable camaraderie and you truly feel their heartbreak as members of their band begin to fall.

The costumes were constructed by Cat Lovejoy and are quite beautiful. The set, designed by artistic director Joel Froomkin, and the lighting, designed by Jacob Ziegler, allow the stage to transform into many different settings. Walls open and close, the barricade comes together like a 3D puzzle, and Javert's fate is portrayed cleverly.

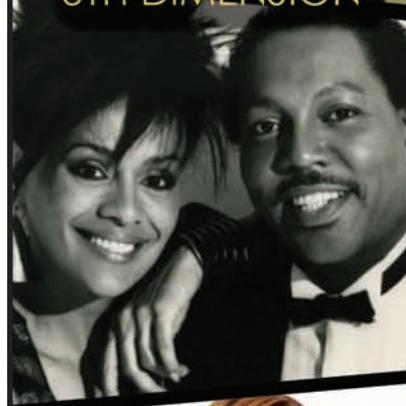
Many of the cast members have appeared in other productions of *Les Misérables*, and their youthful passion shines through. Once the kinks are worked out of the sound system, I have no doubt this production will be one that northeast Indiana theater audiences talk about for years to come.

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Katniss Wins Again; Katniss Always Wins

Tops at the Box: Katniss wins again. Spoiler alert: Katniss always wins. Katniss is the one, guys. She is the way. *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1* once again took the No. 1 spot at last weekend's U.S. box office, selling another \$21.6 million, bringing the dystopian action drama's 17-day total to \$258 million in the U.S. and \$560 million worldwide. Dang, girl. Do your thing.

Also at the Box: Fox's *Penguins of Madagascar* continued to disappoint in a major way, taking the No. 2 spot last weekend with another \$11 million in sales, upping the flick's 10-day total to \$49 million in the U.S. and \$143 million worldwide. Looks like the parents aren't too interested in taking the children out into the cold.

Ensemble comedy *Horrible Bosses 2* took the No. 3 spot at last weekend's box office, selling \$8.6 million, bringing the flick's 10-day total to \$36 million.

Next up at the No. 4 spot was *Big Hero 6* which sold another \$8.1 million, bringing the film's five-week total to \$177 million in the U.S. and \$240 worldwide. Not exactly the kind of sales Disney was hoping for with



Screen Time

GREG W. LOCKE

their big fall film, but not too bad either. And it's a good flick that will likely do well for years to come in the digital and home video markets.

Rounding out last weekend's Top 5 was Christopher Nolan's big sci-fi epic, *Interstellar*, which sold another \$8 million, upping the flick's five-week U.S. sales total to \$159 million. No bad. But yo, check this out: Nolan's flawed masterpiece (masterpiece?) has sold almost \$600 million worldwide already. This means that Nolan will continue to be able to do anything he wants without anyone questioning him. Which means that he will probably continue to make very flawed films. Wonderfully beautiful, complex, entertaining, broken movies. Also of note: the excellent *The Theory of Everything* took the No. 7 spot at the box office, selling \$2.7 million, upping the film's total to \$13 million.

Nice work, Stephen Hawking. Good flick, that one.

New This Week: Oh boy. Ridley Scott. Ohhhhh Ridley, just what in the hell are you doing? Scott's new film, *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, looks beyond silly. It's a production epic that shoots for the stars, Scott attempting to make a biblical classic using a huge budget, lots of effects, a classic text and a sprawling, talented cast. And lots of makeup and over-the-top weirdness. The film looks truly awful, and critics are passionately confirming that the film is, in fact, every bit as bad as the trailer suggests. What's wrong with Ridley Scott? Why can't the guy who used to only make great movies make even a decent film anymore? He has his choice of scripts, endless financiers and a line of great actors dying to work with him. *Exodus* might sell decent for a couple of weeks, but I'm pretty sure it'll go down as a film people watch to laugh at while they're stoned. Or maybe a film they put on to help them fall asleep.

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