**CAMUS**

**‘MADE IN DAGENHAM’ – JUNE 2025**

Your production had a very strong line-up of principals and was well presented. With the addition of furniture and properties the different scenes were simply and quickly set to depict the hospital, the room in Parliament and the factory floors. The trucks moved on and off easily. The staircases and walkway made an interesting alternative for some of the scenes and enabled the show to move along more easily. The way the girls wheeled on their sewing machines and the speed of the scene changes kept up the momentum and was theatre in itself.

The opening scene was in the kitchen of the O’Grady house and a typical day for Rita - getting children organised, running the house and then going out to the factory to put in a day’s work. A typical working-class woman of the 1960’s with a husband who took things for granted and didn’t even remember anniversaries.

In that lead role Polly was first rate. We saw her gradually become more involved in the cause, to fight for women’s rights in the workplace. She grew into a confident, strong spokesperson and eventually it impacted on her marriage to Eddie.

As her husband, Ryan Stevens depicted a man of the time, never expecting his wife to be so brave as to stand up for what she believed. The reading of the letter was a moving scene and Ryan acted and sang securely as Eddie.

Their son and daughter were played by Dawson King and Eliza York on the evening I attended and they acquitted themselves well. It’s a large stage for youngsters to appear on but they seemed at ease.

The role of Harold Wilson was played by Kieran Jenkins. He paced up and down a lot and maintained a light Yorkshire accent and his ‘Always a Problem’ was good.

Rosalind Robins had a more convincing accent and I liked her portrayal of Barbara Castle – she had clearly studied her walk and mannerisms. ‘Ideal World’ was notable.

As the shop steward Monty, who represented the women workers but wasn’t strong enough to stand up to the management on their behalf, Gareth gave a sound performance. He was an unassuming man and despite his feelings for Connie he never felt able to declare them ---- until it was too late.

Neil Gibson gave an impressive performance as the brash American executive Mr Tooley. His every word could be heard and he sustained a most convincing accent.

Freya Wall was praiseworthy in the role of Lisa. The rather unlikely friendship between Rita and her was nicely depicted and as we watched it developed into a strong and lasting one. Lisa’s encouragement and support made Rita believe in herself.

The factory girls were a wonderfully diverse mixture of characters and all contributed greatly to the production.

Emily played the foul-mouthed Beryl with ease and enthusiasm. She always ‘lives’ her role on stage, and Nicola York was very good as Connie. Aedan King, Sarah Newey and Laura deserve mention too for their commendable performances.

The numerous named male roles, either employees/managers of Ford or of Parliament were all secure in their performances and the Cortina Man, Dale Barrell had a great time with his song surrounded by the glitzy silver sequinned dancers.

Costumes were good and suitable for the time and the hair styles reflected the period too. Kieran Jenkin’s coat was not the duffel style as Wilson’s was (in fact I had a Gannex exactly like his back in the day) and a Prime Minister would not wear white socks with a suit or overcoat. Perhaps Keiran forgot to change his socks?

The company sang well throughout whether as solos, duets, etc but in the first act the volume of the orchestra was too loud and the underscored dialogue and singing was very hard to hear. Fortunately the second act was much better and I could hear everything including the harmonies which came out beautifully. I understand that there is a problem with the amplification from the personal mikes not being on the same system as the band. (?) I’m not technical so may have misheard the reason. Never-the-less I do appreciate that the orchestra, under the direction of Lizzie Hales, were very accomplished and am hopeful that in future it may be possible to correct the imbalance. Notable musical numbers were ‘I’m Sorry I Love You’, ’Same Old Story’, ‘Everybody Out’ to name a but a few, the rousing ‘This is America’ and of course ‘Made in Dagenham’.

I’m sure Eddie was pleased with the results of his and the cast’s hard work. The large cast was full of energy and were clearly enjoying telling the story and the street scene strike marches were particularly ‘striking’! Well done everyone.

Ashleigh Knight’s choreography was suitable for the whole company with the Cheer Leaders and the Cortina Girls being particularly entertaining - all the choreographed numbers were attractive and well executed by those involved.

I’m afraid that it was well-nigh impossible to read the programme and certainly not in the auditorium on the night. The shape of it was unusual and it was jammed full of interesting articles and facts about the history and musical itself, but even with the use of spectacles and a magnifier I had to resort to looking up musical numbers on a web site. The lay out is good and although the font is small on the first couple of pages, it is legible. The problem starts on the page headed ‘The Women of Dagenham’. Cast biographies are OK, but once again it diminishes on the centre page and that has the information in which the audience are most interested.

Thank you once again for inviting me to see ‘Made in Dagenham’ and for your hospitality on the evening which was most enjoyable.

E. Gloria Smith

NODA SE Regional Representative – Distrtict 12