

WAOS presents

# SWEENEY TODD

THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

Music and Lyrics by  
**STEPHEN SONDHEIM**

Book by  
**HUGH WHEELER**



**NEVER FORGET  
NEVER FORGIVE**

**Rhoda McGaw Theatre  
Woking**

**Tuesday to Saturday**

**10th to 14th November 2015**

**Programme £2.50**



Affiliated to the  
National Operatic and  
Dramatic Association



Presented by arrangement with JOSEF WEINBERGER LIMITED on behalf of MUSIC THEATRE INTERNATIONAL of New York



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**'SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET' – NOVEMBER 2015**  
**WOKING AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY**

'Sweeney Todd' had only short runs in both New York and London, 557 and 157 performances respectively, despite the fact that it is considered to be one of Sondheim's most melodic and verbally acute scores. It draws on different styles of musical composition including English ballads, Victorian ditties and folk music, and the composer amused himself by using a William Walton-like cadence whenever the word 'London' was set.

You may remember that I'm not a great Sondheim fan, although I do of course appreciate that the words and music are incredibly clever, but for the uninitiated they make for uncomfortable listening. However I was pleased to see that the theatre was fairly full on Friday evening and that the audience were appreciative of the piece.

As Lee says in his message, the score is demanding and complex and this alone presents an enormous challenge to the vocalists. The staging is tricky too, but the set served all purposes and the different levels created the drop necessary in order that the customers destined to be made into pies could fall down the chute. The simple addition of a balustrade stage right created the house/window effect on that level, and the props and furniture were suitable for the period, except for the shiny stainless steel bowl as mentioned by Chris.

The opening number was powerfully sung, very threatening and set the scene for the darkness that is the tale of the demon barber of Fleet Street. It was a visual feast with the cast representing a wonderfully varied lot of characters. The street costumes looked authentic, not just adapted to look scruffy, and the clothes worn by Judge Turpin and Beadle Bamford were in contrast quite splendid.

Had I not known better I would not have recognised Lee and what a superb job he did with the role of Sweeney Todd. His singing was faultless, and in the role of the man who returns to England after being sent off to Australia 15 years earlier, cheated of the life

he should have had, we witnessed how his intention to avenge the wrong clearly grew into an overriding obsession as the story progressed.

Jenny was excellent as Mrs. Lovett. Her singing and acting couldn't be faulted but she looked far too clean and wholesome! She was the only woman on stage, apart from the upper class ones, who appeared spotlessly clean. She needed aging somewhat too, and as the make-up was extremely good for all the other characters, quite the best I've seen in 12 years of reviewing shows, I wonder how Jenny escaped without a blemish.

As the young ward Johanna, Becky Bond sang and acted the part with sincerity and charm.

Anthony Hope is the young man who hopes to win Johanna's affections and Lewis Padgett played him convincingly. His vocal ability and acting were commendable.

The role of Judge Turpin, a most unpleasant and corrupt man, is comparable to that of Sweeney Todd in that he is central to the plot and both are incredibly complex characters. Mark was impressive in the role and the flagellation scene was a very powerful one. His stature added to his threatening presence.

His sidekick Beadle Bamford who does his master's bidding so willingly, was played effectively by David Methven. His acting was good but occasionally his voice projection eased off a little.

The asylum scene was really harrowing and a terrible reflection of what happened to the poor people who were committed to them at that time. It was an unsettling scene.

In complete contrast and bringing some lightness to this, on the whole very dark piece, was Adolfo Pirelli, and Graham Kirby-Smith played him brilliantly. His singing was good and he was the epitome of an Italian travelling salesman of the era (except that he wasn't!) His accent was very good and he brought out the comedy in the role. St



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Dunstan's Market Place where we first saw him was bursting with activity and visually uplifting. The props were very good.

Melanie Morrissey gave a first class performance as Tobias Ragg and we saw the change in her character as she grew to feel 'at home' in her new job at the Sweeney/Lovett enterprise.

What a twist in the plot when the Beggar Woman turns out to be Lucie! Hannah Kitchener was totally believable in the part. Her whole demeanour depicted the character of a bent and course old street beggar. She gave a most accomplished performance.

The other remaining named roles supported the principals well, and the chorus members were terrific. Each and every one contributed greatly to this memorable production.

Sound was consistent and sound effects were good – the flapping of birds wings and the roar of the flames particularly – and the lighting added to the atmosphere tremendously.

James Fortune presented a well thought out and directed musical and didn't clutter the stage with furniture or props but made the two tier set work for all locations.

Ian Peters and his musicians were supportive and not overpowering and the challenging musical score was in expert hands.

Your programme has a very striking cover, the contents are interesting to read and it is nicely set out. I'm sure you will want to enter it into the programme/poster competition.

Thank you so much for inviting me to see 'Sweeney Todd' and for your usual hospitality on the evening. I enjoyed as I always do coming up onto the stage afterwards to meet the cast.

Congratulations to everyone involved on staging an exceptionally good show.



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Thank you for inviting me to see the show and for your kind hospitality on the evening.

E. Gloria Smith

N.O.D.A. South East Regional Representative – District 12