

Moll Flanders



Centrepiece from 'After' (1731) by William Hogarth. Original in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

"The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, Etc. Who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest and died a Penitent. Written from her own Memorandums".



WOKING AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY

MOLL FLANDERS

MAY 2008

I was delighted to be asked to attend a musical that I hadn't seen before and was very much looking forward to it. I wasn't disappointed. It was a most enjoyable evening's entertainment and a great pity that more people were not prepared to risk seeing a relatively unknown musical. They missed a treat.

Martine's direction was once again exceptionally good and as always she set the chorus in interesting, attractive groupings and gave them plenty of business. I appreciate that in this show the company had to concentrate on some very difficult musical numbers but every scene came to life and I loved the way the stage-coach was set. It was so realistic.

The music in the first act was at times reminiscent of Sondheim and far more difficult to learn and sing than one of the better known 'pot boilers', but the company were well rehearsed by the musical director Ian Peters. His small band played beautifully and at no time did they overpower the performers, even during the underscoring. The unaccompanied singing was excellent.

The opening scene created the atmosphere of Newgate Prison with its motley lot of prisoners, and Elizabeth's impregnation was depicted simply and without any awkwardness by Gillian Freeman and Keith White.

Gillian gave her usual secure performance and was able to join the chorus for many of the numbers. Keith was kept busy with three roles and I didn't actually recognise him as the Fop so top marks to the make-up team.

The cast doubled and trebled up, which must have made it a particularly enjoyable show to take part in, and that's how it came across to the audience.

Colin Attridge's Mayor was the best of his roles and Vanora Severs was suitably regal as Lady Constable.

As her two sons, Robert and Cyril, Jonathan Batchelor and Brett Walker both performed well and Brett's singing was especially good. I don't know whether or not Amy Parker's speaking voice is normally so shrill, but it suited her fit of pique with Moll.

In the title role, Tasha Bennett was excellent. Because of the nature of Moll it would have been easy to overplay the part but she didn't. She made a believable, very likeable Moll and her singing voice, whilst not a typical musical theatre style voice, was charming and clear. As such a lot of the story is set to music, diction is important and her every word could be heard.

The two young girls, Eleanor Hegarty and Kathryn Bartlett acquitted themselves well as young and older Moll.

A good characterisation from Samantha Moylan-Heydt, whose convincing Cockney accent was reminiscent of Pauline Quirke's, as the business like Mother Midnight, and an hysterically funny performance from Roger Thomas as Biggins the invalid. He did it brilliantly with some wonderful facial expressions, and I can only imagine the fun you must have all had in rehearsal with some of the scenes in this particular musical!

Phil Scaife's debut was fine, he just tended to drop his voice a little so that some of his dialogue was lost when playing Mr. Honest.

A very good performance was from Mike Bartlett as he Irish rogue Jemmy, and his relationship and romp with Moll was delightfully staged. His singing was strong too.

There are so many characters in this show that it would be impossible to cover them all but suffice it to say that everyone taking part contributed to the success of this unknown but most enjoyable musical.

The costumes and props were very good, and the lighting added much to the feel of the piece. Sound was good and the back stage crew worked quietly together on the scene changes.

You have produced another classic programme with all the information in the right place and the history of Moll Flanders was very interesting. Although her life was a roller coaster series of highs and lows, she dealt with it admirably and never gave up. Her final descent into poverty took her back to where it had all started, making a thought provoking end to the story.

Thank you for inviting me to come and see the show and also to Roger for his hospitality on the evening. It was a pleasure to meet the cast on stage afterwards and both Martine and Ian in the interval.

E. Gloria Smith

NODA South East Regional Representative District 12