



Review: Actorsingers tackle 'Man of La Mancha'

Man of La Mancha has a score that is filled with the kind of songs that are familiar from PBS pledge drive specials.

With a long initial Broadway run, a film version and a recent Broadway revival, it's not easy to make this kind of material fresh. Last weekend the Actorsingers tried.

The production wasn't a particularly fresh take on the tired show, but it was tight, polished and a high-caliber community theater production.

In a production where the performances were, for the most part, solid, a few stood out as excellent.

In the title role, David White brought a Richard Harris-like presence to the Cervantes/Quixote/Quijana character and that's certainly not a bad thing.

Joelle Morris deserved all the applause she received for her portrayal of Aldonza/Dulcinea. Though her acting was uneven, her ability to sell a song—not just sing it—was remarkable.

Joey Tomacchio gave a fine character performance as Sancho Panza, Quixote's Manservant and the show's comic relief. His comedic choices were hilarious. Let's just say if The Fab Five are ever looking for a sixth, they need look no further.

One of the shortcomings of most community theater is the ensemble work. The seven men playing The Muleteers, a band of murderers and thieves confined to the prison, overcame this usual deficiency. They shone with professional aplomb.

The show's director, Brett Mallard deserves credit for being willing to explore the show's violent undercurrent. In staging the scenes between Aldonza and The Muleteers, it was obvious Mallard wanted it to be real: real bawdy, real lewd and real violent.

This worked, for the most part. The violence was realistic enough to be mildly disturbing.

During a scene late in the show where Aldonza is beaten and left for dead, he went too far. As the scene progressed, the discomfort level in the theater began to rise and crested in a collective cringe when she was thrown against a wall.

Achieving that level of realism in a stage play is not easy and should be commended. Paradoxically, though, that one scene went so far it seemed to stand out more for its ability to shock. It didn't fit with the emotional level of the rest of the show.

While some of the acting was uneven, the show soared with solid vocal work—leads and secondary parts alike. Each time the show began to drag for some deficit in the acting, the music was cued and all imperfections were forgotten. Praise goes to musical director Michele Henderson for her work with the vocals and the orchestra.

In what seemed like an attempt to demonstrate their engineering prowess, in an otherwise simple show, a large ramp was laboriously lowered from the rafters to let characters in and out of the prison.

The bridge was overly dramatic (and distracting), mostly because it took too long to raise and lower, creating an artificial dramatic build-up each time it appeared. The set should never be a character in the show, unless it's a character in the show.

Overall, the emotional effect of the show didn't work for me, but who am I to say? The people around me who paid \$12 to \$15 for tickets rushed to their feet at the curtain call.

If audience appreciation is any indication of a show's success, then the Actorsingers can rest assured that they may well have 50 more years to ply their craft.

Perhaps now that they've mastered so many aspects of theatrical production, they will next employ a dialect coach to ease some of those New Hampshire accents from the stage.

—Patty Caya