



Theater review:

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by David James

'Les Mis' cast shines in FLOT production

Performing before a full house Saturday night at the Salisbury Theatre, the Fairbanks Light Opera Theatre staged an energetic production of "Les Misérables," the popular musical based on Victor Hugo's classic novel of the same title. It's a show well worth attending.

Set in France during the early 19th century, the story follows the path of Jean Valjean from the time of his release from prison after serving 19 years for stealing a loaf of bread. Offered a second chance in life by a bishop, he takes an assumed name and prospers as a factory owner and mayor in a small town. There he takes in Cosette, the young daughter of a dying prostitute, raising her into adulthood. The tale culminates in Paris during the June Rebellion of 1832, when students fought against the government in an ultimately failed effort at affirming the rights of poor workers. There Cosette meets and falls in love with Marius, a student leader, while Valjean joins their cause and is forced to confront the truth of his past.

Sylvain Demers, a frequent performer in Fairbanks productions, shines in the lead role. As Valjean he draws the audience's sympathy not only with his singing, but also with his remarkable range of facial expressions that he displays as his character reacts to the transpiring events. As Valjean ages, Demers' body language, even more than his makeup, convey a man slowly dropping beneath the weight of accumulated years and the hardships they have brought.

Equally impressive is Brian Bennett, who portrays the wicked Javert, a police officer who makes it his life's job to track down Valjean and return him to prison. Bennett is deftly able to gain the audience's full contempt, only to suddenly garner sympathy when Javert finally recognizes his own evil and commits suicide.

Brandon Michael is quite convincing as the charismatic student leader Marius as he leads the ensemble players to the barricades and their ill-fated stand against the government. He seems just the type to protest against the injustices of 19th century France that are well presented earlier in the play. Ciara Emily Newman is appropriately understated as Cosette, walking the thin line between her passion for Marius and the necessity of being a proper lady of the era. In the other major female role, Adele States makes a fine Eponine, honest

but assertive and unwilling to play by gender rules.

Filling out the main cast are Terry McCarthy and Jenni Warren, who provide fine comic counterpoints as the selfish and perpetually scamming Thénardiens, Anna Polum as the prostitute Fantine, Morgan Reed as the kindly Bishop of Digne, and 10-year-old Isaac Dershin who steals several scenes as the street urchin Gavroche.

Stage director Theresa Reed, musical director George Rydlinski, production designer Kade Mendelowitz, the ensemble and the musicians are offering a highly professional and exuberant Les Misérables worthy of praise. See it while you can.

Les Misérables continues through this weekend with performances tonight and Sunday at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 4 p.m.. Tickets are available at the box office or at the company's website, flot.org.



Les Miserables

Eric Engman/News-Miner
Cast members perform during dress rehearsal of the Fairbanks Light Opera Theatre production of "Les Miserables" at the UAF Salisbury Theatre.