



(Photo by Lance Huntley)

Professor Henry Higgins (Ben Ball) agrees to teach Cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle (Brenna Sammon) the Queen's English.

Loverly 'My Fair Lady' plays the Spindrifft PACIFICA PRODUCTION IS A GEM

By Jean Bartlett
Tribune Writer

Each layer of the Lerner and Loewe musical "My Fair Lady" brims with character, brilliant lines and beautiful music. An adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's 1913 play "Pygmalion," the musical is chock-full of beloved songs, including: "Wouldn't It Be Lovely," "The Rain In Spain" and "I Could Have Danced All Night." It was an immediate success when it debuted on Broadway in March of 1956.

Currently playing the mainstage of the Pacifica Spindrifft Players, its director Scott Scholes, music director Barry Koron, choreographer Emily Simpson, and every member of the cast and crew miss absolutely nothing in delivering this gem.

A nontraditional love story, the play opens on a bustling scene at London's Covent Garden where we meet the story's protagonists Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins. Higgins, a professor of phonetics, loves the sound of his own articulated English. He has written books on both philology and Old English. He claims that with just a few words spoken, he can glean the speaker's origins to within six miles, and clearly he is not smitten with the "English" of those from Yorkshire, Cornwall, the United States, Ireland, Scotland and a great deal of England. Suddenly Eliza Doolittle's voice rises to meet him. She does not articulate her "aitches" and in fact pronounces "h" in front of words that don't have one, like "ever."

Eliza is selling flowers outside the opera at Covent Garden. An opera patron has accidentally knocked over her flowers and she is giving him a dressing down. The listening professor deduces that her Cockney accent is specific to the Lisson Grove District of London, which is correct. Noticing that the professor is taking notes, Eliza gives him a bit of the "what for." But inwardly she decides she will go to Higgins' home and engage his services for diction lessons. She wants to be "A lady in a flower shop instead of sellin' at the corner of Tottenham Court Road."

At the home of the well-to-do Higgins, fellow linguist Colonel Pickering has been invited to comfortably settle in as a long-term guest. When Eliza arrives, Higgins finds her accent so horrific that he sees her request as a challenge. He boasts to Pickering that in just a few months of training, he will be able to pass Eliza off as a duchess. The wager is on and the transformation of Eliza begins. As these two titanic personalities go at it – defiant bachelor Higgins, clearly riddled by his excellent diction and his complete lack of empathy, and Eliza, an empowered woman in the making who is being educated by an "arse" – they both discover a softer side.

Brenna Sammon is triumphant as Eliza Doolittle. She moves flawlessly from Cockney to the Queen's English. Her first rate acting runs a full sweep of anger, dignity, hilarity and growth, and her soprano is a gift. Brava. Ben Ball delivers the articulate, verbose and personally unaware Henry Higgins like grace under fire. His Higgins is wonderfully impossible and quietly charismatic. Of course Eliza falls for him as does the audience.

Steve Schwartz, as Higgins' linguistics colleague Colonel Pickering, is urbane – the Zen to Higgins' (insensitive) zeal. Lauren Arnold, Ensemble and Mrs. Hopkins, was born to sing, dance and act. She is a marvel. Franco St. John-Silva, Ensemble and Professor Karpathy, is another showstopper. All actors are part of a hardworking, multi-talented cast that absolutely thrills.

Also clearly starring in this production are Audra Batter's beautifully tailored costumes. The set designed by Jim Sousa and constructed by Gary Smith and Gary Pugh Newman is ingenious, although during this early review, time-consuming for the actors to reset between scenes. Hats off to director Scott Scholes, choreographer Emily Simpson and music director Barry Koron, for giving us a finely-crafted, dazzling presentation of a musical that we love.

"My Fair Lady" plays weekends at PSP Theater, 1050 Crespi Drive, Pacifica, through September 2. Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. Sunday at 2 p.m. Box Office: 650-359-8002 or online at www.pacificaspindriftplayers.org. Tickets: \$30/adults, \$25 seniors and students. Some shows already sold out. Don't wait to book.

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