

Broadway Live Insider

Hooked on Phonics: MY FAIR LADY Opening Night

Michael J. Miller

The Lincoln Center Theatre Company's touring production of their 2018 revival of **My Fair Lady** begins and ends with Eliza Doolittle positioned alone at the front of the stage. At the top, she's there as an impoverished flower girl in the midst of her daily struggle to survive in Edwardian London; as the show closes she's in the same spot on stage, but looking very much the proper lady she's become over the course of the three hour production.

These solo downstage-center moments frame Eliza as alone, signaling her independence. These images are just one of several times in this beautifully tuneful, visually stunning and pragmatically tough-minded production that acclaimed director Bartlett Sher emphasizes the themes of female equality found in the source material, George Bernard Shaw's play "Pygmalion". Such a pro-women stance was diminished somewhat in Lerner & Loewe's musical adaptation from the late 1950's on Broadway and in the subsequent motion picture adaptation.

Henry Higgins, an Edwardian version of a Hooked on Phonics infomercial, takes all the credit for Eliza's transformation. He's insufferable. Eliza here is not a timid waif, and her decision to put up with his insults and verbal abuse she tolerates, not as a shrinking violet, but as a shrewd woman who knows a thing or two about cost-benefit calculation.

The show is beautifully evocative, with lighting by Donald Holder, Michael Yeargan's eye-popping sets, and exquisite costumes from Catherine Zuber. The cast is stunning as well, especially considering their relative newness to professional theatre. For several in lead roles and more so in the ensemble, this show is their first national touring production. It's always a special treat to see such obvious Broadway talent enthusiastically coming into their own on a major touring stage such as this.

As Keeneland's spring meet approaches, the scene at the Ascot Races is especially thrilling to see. And, thankfully, the joyous parade of drag queens romping across the stage during the rousing "I'm Getting Married in the Morning" were not cancelled during the current session of the Kentucky General Assembly. Someone got to the church on time.

Broadway Live at the Opera House has always been good to bring classic programming to its series along with more contemporary bops. My Fair Lady fits the bill this season nicely.

If you get frustrated by the Cockney accents during the first part of the show, just hang with it and realize that, um, isn't that kind of the point? It's like watching The Banshees of Inisherin without subtitles. But, hey, it's St. Patrick's Day weekend. Chill.

INSIDER TIP: The Lexington Opera House now offers Valet Parking for \$22 starting one hour before curtain in the pull through drive way on Short Street. Probably not a bad idea with the Sweet 16 and other events going on downtown this weekend. Cash only, which is odd, since the concessions inside the venue are cashless.