



## The Show(s) Must Go On

### Showstoppers

**S**howstopper. An act so striking or impressive that the show must be delayed until the audience quiets down. It's asking a bit much to find 20 or so numbers actually stopping the same show, so for the Pirates production in Bettembourg last week the criterion for including the eponymous Showstoppers presumably was their effect on the shows they originally came from.

For instance, Get Me To The Church On Time has stopped many a production of My Fair Lady and in the capable hands of a bouncing cockney Stuart Alexander probably would have done so here, apart from being the last pre-interval number anyway. So too, from the audience reaction, would have been the duet between Phoebe Smith (lately 'Millie') and Steve Preston on Never Too Old To Fall In Love (The Boy Friend), though what was invoking the roaring was mostly his well

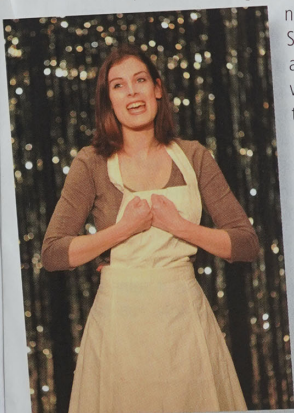
mimed gradual falling apart as age caught up with him. Phoebe was an excellent foil to Steve's decrepitude.

Steve and Stuart are long-term Pirates stalwarts, and they teamed up again successfully with a complete newcomer, Mohamed Sbiri, in two numbers here: the trio Belle (Notre Dame De Paris), and less successfully in the quartet passage A Model of Decorum and Tranquillity (Chess) with Phoebe Smith making the fourth. Mohamed also delivered a virtually show-stopping solo with Avoir Une Fille (Roméo et Juliette), and Steve also soloed beautifully on the almost hymnal Bring Him Home (Les Misérables).

Which brings me to a problem. Both Avoir Une Fille and Bring Him Home are soliloquies. They stood up here because they were so well done, but there was a top-heavy number of such

soliloquies, where one character simply statically expresses a long chain of thought. With Tell Me It's Not True (Beverley Atkinson - Blood Brothers), On My Own (Phoebe Smith - Les Misérables), I Know Him So Well (a dual soliloquy: Phoebe Smith and Rota Ramanatsialonina - Chess), How Many Tears (Phoebe - Martin Guerre), and even Don't Cry For Me Argentina (Zsafia Eberhard), and the Sound of Music (Emma van Opstal) it added up to 9 of the 21 numbers. A little too similar, a little too static, and also rather over diffident and frequently out-volumed by the piano accompaniment.

Not so with Rona Ramanatsialonina's Can't Help Lovin' That Man (Show Boat), the difference surely largely due to it being a much more popular song than most in the show. Originally it was a happy celebration of the singer's love, while Roma made it more a sad reflection on fate, but for entertainment this was the best







female performance of the night. She also shared with Phoebe Smith and Emma van Opstal in an excellently done Andrews Sisters-like trio singing *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *Three Little Maids* (*Hot Mikado*).

Two extracts from *The Phantom of The Opera* were elaborately costumed and blocked and generally given the full operatic treatment, Phoebe Smith playing Meg to Elizabeth Venner's Christine in the introductory *Angel of Music* and Steve Preston coming in as the suitably masked Phantom to lead her away through the audience to his hide. In total this was impressive, but out of balance with the more simply presented rest of the show.



Three major dance routines carried on the improvement in this area we saw in *Millie* last year: from *Fame*, *Sweet Charity* (Hey Big Spender) and from *Mamma Mia*. It's probably better to draw a veil over the last, not helped by a monotonously thudding from the audience. *Fame* is about athletic teenagers: it wasn't for want of trying that the same dancers were more convincing as the seductive prostitutes of *Charity*.

The finale had the whole group singing *You'll Never Walk Alone* from *Carousel* in not too bad a choice for an ending, there being hopefully no Everton supporter in the audience.

Not credited in the program was Julien Farlin, who here adopted a Joel Gray-style persona as MC. He had the face and body movements for it, but a rather leaden text to work from, and he should lose a tendency to hammer home his jokes.



The whole thing was put together by director Elizabeth Venner and producer Catherine Howdle in some two months. It showed a little, especially in the lighting, but to get this good after two months is applaudable. Athena Teligadas deserves congratulations for the costumes.