



The Glamorgan Drama League - The Glammies 2023

Moderator's Report

NOTE: The Appraisers comments are mixed up in order to keep them as anonymous as possible

Moderator	Jan Samuel
Name of play	Chess The Musical
Name of Company	Penarth Operatic & Dramatic Society
Where/when performed	The Paget Rooms, Penarth 17/5/23 – 20/5/23
Intro	<p>Appraiser 1: Having never seen CHESS but like most people I knew 2 of its songs, I was really looking forward to it. Lately PODS have been doing some fabulous shows so I hoped I was in for a great evening. It was a sell-out out so I guess everyone was expecting something special. Lovely welcome as usual, always prepared with script and programme. I loved the programme, very informative and very helpful if you didn't know the storyline. Well Done again PODS.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: This is a show I was really looking forward to see, it has long been a favourite of mine having performed in it nearly twenty years ago. I would like to thank the company for their warm welcome .</p> <p>Appraiser 3: A solid and well thought out production of extremely high standards.</p>
Production	<p>Appraiser 1: I liked Fiona's production especially the little nuances that she had added in, for instance, the young Florence and Freddie and their parents. I also loved the Rock Choir this was totally unexpected to me but worked really well. I do however think that some of the props were too modern . This is set in the 1980's and the mobile phones tv cameras and tv were too new in my opinion. As I mentioned above , I liked the set for its simplicity and effect.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Goodness me PODS, you don't want to make my life easy, do you? Firstly, I think its important to note that this may be called Chess the Musical, but it is an operetta and must be appraised as such! (But operetta would scare off the public, so musical the title remains). It's clear that the whole company paid attention to every detail and nuance to enhance the music and lyrics. You could lift this show as is and drop it on to any large professional stage in the world and still have a satisfied audience. Just brilliant all round.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: Not sure what to say here as it was really exceptional. The costumes, the music, the singing, the movement, the Rock Choir – WOW., the Choreography, the Musical Direction and the Director - it was all incredible. As I said on the night, it was good enough for the W.M.C.</p>
Presentation	
Set	<p>Appraiser 1: The moment I laid eyes on the stage my jaw dropped. This set <i>popped!</i> I spent a large amount of the pre show desperate to find a curve, a circle, even a hint of a bendy line. Nada. The chess board in the centre exploded out across all aspect of the set, and in doing so into the lives of our characters. Chess: A world where everything is black and white, so no colour invaded our set, allowing for some superb lighting and costume choices to come. The use of the sides to give us our scenes away from the tournaments, the TV screen to give us that wonderful exposition – which in turn meant it wasn't left to actors to deliver and clog up dialogue. Just wonderful.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: As there were no main tabs, it was possible to get a look at the set which I think worked really well. The sloping chess board being the main character of the set which was very well used by the Arbiter and rock choir. Blocking two areas off Stage Left and right to use as the different hotels worked well . I also liked the way the company used the main auditorium for different scenes</p> <p>Especially for the Merchandisers and the Bangkok opening of Act 2. As I mentioned above , I liked the set for its simplicity and effect. Very good set design by Andy Bradshaw.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: A very clever set which really set the atmosphere of the production. Not too little, not too much just right. Liked the use of the TV screen to say where they were – although I nearly missed it! Liked the levels used and the way it allowed the cast to move about easily. Well Done Andy Bradshaw and Team</p>
Costume	<p>Appraiser 1: On the whole I really liked the costumes, I thought the Rock Choir Costumes worked really well. I believe all Florences' costumes looked stunning , I did not however like Freddie's costumes for Act Two it did not work for me.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Crikey there is a lot to unpack here.</p> <p>Chorus: The beautifully kitsch welcome committee in Merano, with their delightfully Tyrolean outfits giving us a hint of Anna from Frozen. The American marketing teams wanting us to buy</p>

	<p>all kinds of Chess related tat as they paraded around the auditorium, those devastatingly stunning outfits to welcome us to Bangkok (I will lay my hands on some of those gold wings the ladies at the front had if it kills me), and finally to the elegance of the black and white formal wear in the final scenes. Not a stitch out of place and every detail adding life to an already vibrant performance.</p> <p>Chess Pieces: A stroke of genius. I notice from a quick flick through the libretto that they aren't specified as characters, so this is a PODS original concept? Bravo! I was very much put in mind of Gaultier's tribute to A Clockwork Orange in the final segment of Madonna's Blonde Ambition Tour in 1990 (worth a look for its design as a show, even if you aren't a fan of Madge) with the harnesses and bowler hats at one point. To have them as fetishists being controlled by their relevant masters, while the show clearly tells us that They are the true masters where with the players their addicted submissives. Oh, the levels within levels. Who came up with this? What had you been drinking? And where do I get an invite? I am in awe.</p> <p>Characters: Period and context are potentially restraining factors here. The officials in their suits – but with those pocket squares and ties always reminding you just where allegiances lie. More black and white bases, with just the odd move into dark blues to show us that life is not just B&W. Florence in white to match her Chess playing partner, only to become the scarlet woman in a deep red as we see that potentially there is blood on her hands, the Lady Macbeth of our games. Breath taking. Then of course our Pawn Star, all tee shirts, branding and casual to play the polar opposite of Anatoly – suited and booted at almost every occasion until he defects, and his outfits relax, but only a little.</p> <p>These costumes tell us as much of the story as the lyrics.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: The costumes were again exceptional, especially the Rock Choir – thought their costumer were amazing. Also really likes the Red Dress on Florence at the end. Very striking. Well Done Debbie Apollonio and Team, great work. I also need to mention the Chess Headpieces by Andy Bradshaw, very, very clever and it made them stand out. Well Done Andy,</p>
Makeup	<p>Appraiser 1: I liked all the makeup as it didn't seem too obtrusive.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Great.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: Solid makeup here on the characters. Just right for the ladies and not really noticeable (if present) on the chaps.</p> <p>The real makeup to be assessed is our devious little chess pieces. Silvers and blues to bring out the black and white. Heavy eye shadow to give us sultry temptations beautifully underplaying the infidelity of the relationships at play. Most noticeable on Gabbie Crick giving full on 'Mrs Grey' 50 Shades vibes.</p>
Props	<p>Appraiser 1: Very Good use of props, even though I thought some looked too modern..</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Props were all very well thought out and worked.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: A lot of thought must've gone into the props. The chess sets etc. as a vital part of the show. A beer bottle that actually smashes on impact! The American marketeers offering their wares. No detail overlooked, but most importantly, nothing there for the sake of it. Perfect.</p>
Lighting	<p>Appraiser 1: Great atmospheric lighting,</p> <p>Appraiser 2: So, there you are, with a black and white set, giving you free reign to go bonkers with every colour of the rainbow. Or as PODS displayed, you use colour very sparingly and extremely effectively. One glorious moment had the stage divided into a deep red and blue with no overlap, giving us the East/West divide of the cold war in a snap. Interestingly, my guest for the evening grew up in California during the 80s and it would be remiss of me not to pass on her thoughts on this based on growing up right in the 'conflict'. Her comment was 'Perfecto' on this moment.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: Lighting was excellent throughout, it was really effective. Lightsource Production Services are to be congratulated on an amazing and professional lighting design.</p>
Music/Musical Direction (where appropriate)	<p>Appraiser 1: Initially, I did find that numbers with larger casts on stage were hard to hear. I noticed that it appeared the whole cast was individually mic'd up. I suspect it was just a lot of sound at once and just overwhelmed. While having that many mics is a lovely luxury, perhaps in a venue of this size, with a cast of such numbers, floating mics for chorus is sufficient. I did notice that this improved in the scone half though.</p> <p>Let's bring out the elephant in the room: ABBA! Chess 100% has that unmistakable ABBA sound and I thought that having ABBA as your house music, to attune our ears to Bjorn and Benny's chords and movements was a stroke of genius. Plus, who doesn't love ABBA? (Weirdos, that's who). Particularly from the Chess pieces, I really found that I could hear Agnetha and Frida in the vocals – which I take as a choice from Ben Davies, and a brilliant one at that.</p> <p>I Know Him So Well – The tune that I can't resist stopping and giving it large in the lounge. Every. Single. Time. It builds, its bold, by the time Elaine and Barb are in full flow it's a belter.</p>

	<p>Yet – PODS underplayed it and brought it right down to a soft piece and OH MY DAYS YES! I would never have considered this, but these are two broken women, pawns in somebody else's games. Of course, they would be subdued and reflective. What an absolutely genius move on PODS part.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: In what is a very complicated musical where timing is essential it worked very well during the performance. The band never overpowered the singers, and had a lovely sound.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: The musicians were fabulous. If I have one point to make it is that I was sat at the front and because I was so close to the musicians and all the radio mics were, or appeared to be, turned up high it was difficult most of the time to understand the singing. I swapped seats for the second half and sat at the back and could understand every word. I need to mention this as I know I wasn't the only one in the audience who had difficulty understanding. I have said this in the past. Everyone involved knows what is being said or sung as they are used to it BUT and audience is seeing it for the first time so something to think of. However, for me, it did not detract.</p> <p>I loved the chorus singing again, especially The Rock Choir. The Soloists – some beautiful singing with lots of meaning in the way they sang. You could actually feel their pain. Well Done everyone especially the Musical Director, Ben Davies and all the musicians.</p>
Sound/background music	<p>Appraiser 1: Bringing us back to the Operetta thing, no music is really background music in such a show – what I did find though is that the choices of when to shift the music focus delivered in spades and gave us the highs and lows, changes in focus and mood that the lib required. Another one nailed.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Lovely feel in the auditorium and background music was good.</p>
Direction	<p>Appraiser 1: I really liked Fiona's stage direction, all the movement seemed natural and nothing looked false. The fact that the Arbiter and Rock Choir were on stage for the majority of the show added to the flow and scene changes worked really well.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Fiona you are a visionary, clearly. To have masterminded all of the elements and brought them together to form this cohesive masterpiece, cannot have been easy. You mention in the programme your love of the show – and this totally lands in every single aspect. I honestly hope that your vision has played out to all of your expectations, because it was outstanding. Your love for this show was in every pore.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: Oh Wow, I have to take my hat off to Fiona Porter-Smith some incredible direction here. To move all those cast so skilfully was quite a fete. I loved the way the Rock Choir was on stage all of the time and on different levels, that was really impressive and added to the atmosphere. The way the cast moved around and used all the stage. No one was OTT, everyone played their part with true feeling and emotion. Very impressive. You could genuinely see this was a 'labour of love' and boy did it work. I was crying at the end and only wish I could have seen it again. Well Done and Congratulations Fiona Porter-Smith.</p>
Choreography (where appropriate)	<p>Appraiser 1: Clever Choreography and they didn't miss a beat. Everyone was so well rehearsed that they made it look easy, but I know it wasn't. I love the way they came into the audience selling their wares, it brought the audience into to the show and there were one or two things I wanted to buy! So, so well thought out. It must have been really difficult managing all those cast BUT the cast made it look so easy and very PROFESSIONAL. Well done and Congratulations Richard Thomas, Ceri Wheatley and Nikki Wilson and to the cast. It was fabulous.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: I think this falls into two categories: Dances: As mentioned before, from the joyous camp of Merano, the sultry one Night in Bangkok, the energy explodes from the stage and brings us into the moment magnificently. This is choreo at its best, leaving us exhilarated and probably as out of breath as the performers. Choreographed Movement: Good grief, a good 75% of the show falls into this. The way the pieces are moved around that central chess board, the arbiter always held in place by the rules of the game, watching over us like a pagan god. I couldn't quite see from my seat, but it certainly gave the feel that the chess pieces moved on that board according to the game rules, so whether they did or not doesn't matter – the illusion landed and added a sublime level to the production. Also, on this point – were the chess games also choreographed to be real games? I heard a few people discussing this, so I would be intrigued to know.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: I enjoyed the choreography with some nice movement and good final setting.</p>
Performances:	
General	<p>Appraiser 1: Knockout! That's all.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Some lovely vocal and acting performances in what is a very difficult show. I thought the male vocals were strong, and liked the Arbiter's performance who never seemed to stop moving even if he had lines or not to say. Anthem at the end of the first half was a</p>

	<p>highpoint for me. I don't know if the girls were struggling with sore throats but sometimes the tone wasn't quite right especially on the quiet and sensitive pieces which tended to be belted.</p>
<p>Teamwork</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Excellent Appraiser 2: Without a doubt some of the best Teamwork I have every seen-on Stage, Professional and Amateur. You all work incredibly well together. Thank You. Appraiser 3: You don't deliver a show of this magnitude without a solid team. Quite naturally there will be strengths and weaknesses in any company – professional or amateur, but a good team works together to cover the cracks, and PODS smashed it. Wherever your weaknesses were, we couldn't see them!</p>
<p>Char 1: The Arbiter played by: Nigel Crick</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Nigel exudes authority. From the opening moments, we are in no doubt that what we are about to witness is his game, the players all pawns at his disposal. One of those brilliant performers where what he doesn't say and do speaks as much as what he does. Exceptional. Appraiser 2: I really liked Nigel's performance as the Arbiter, he had good stage movement and as should be controlled the pace and scenes really well. He totally commanded the stage. One of my favourite performances of the night Congratulations Appraiser 3: Nigel again has an amazing voice which he used to its full potential. He played the part of the Arbiter really well and I did enjoy watching him. You could tell he was 'in charge' or at least he 'thought' he was in charge. Very good and good to watch. Well Done.</p>
<p>Char 2: The Chess Pieces. played by: Debbie Apollonio, Fiona Evans, Sian Evans, Ceri Wheatley, Emma Turner, Gabbie Crick, Dean Matthews</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: 'The Rock Choir' – will stay in my memory for some time, I am actually lost for words. These were truly amazing and deserve a special mention. They were actually brilliant, completely in time with each other. Their costumes were amazing, the choreography incredible and they were so well rehearsed it came naturally to them. I cannot praise them enough. Well Done and Congratulations. Appraiser 2: This talented ensemble was such an inspiring ensemble that I feel its right to appraise them as such. Working that board, those players, the whole story, as directed by their king. Omnipresent and all seeing. Every moment they appeared, we knew that change was coming, and our players were in for a hand of fate to be dealt. Like a well-oiled machine, this team were a driving force to be reckoned with and a delight to watch. Appraiser 3: I have added all of these together as one as I felt it unfair to single anyone of the actors out. I really liked this addition to the show by Fiona and believe all of the actors took to their roles exceptionally well. Definitely along with the Arbiter I enjoyed their performances and really made the production a success.</p>
<p>Char 3: Anatoly Sergievsky played by: Wayne Assiratti</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Very believable performance with so much feeling in his singing. Great stage presence and I believed in his character. Wayne has had a lot of experience and it showed. He commanded attention when he was on stage but never upstaged. Amazing voice and I loved his singing especially 'Anthem' so beautiful It had me in tears. A performance to be proud of. Congratulations. Appraiser 2: My personal opinion is this: Every show has one tune it lives and dies by. For Chess its Anthem. When I recover from Wayne's delivery of it, I will let you know. Wayne downplays Anatoly giving us the payoff that they have all been playing his long game in those closing lines, all the more delightful. We believe his every word, he takes us in along with his handlers, officials, opponents, lover and wife. Stunning. Appraiser 3: Very good performance with strong vocals, his rendition of Anthem at the end of Act One was lovely and definitely memorable.</p>
<p>Char 4: Alexander Molokov played by: Bob Tucker</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Our villain! Or is he? I love how Bob brings the theme of the black and white and delivers it in Molokov, switching back and forth between Evil Ruskie Commie (TM Ronald Reagan, 1984) and man who just believes in his country and his duty. Solid vocals too. A true gem. Appraiser 2: I liked Bob's performance as Molokov, his scenes worked really well and I like The Soviet Machine. Appraiser 3: Great Stage Presence and great voice. He knew how to command attention when he was singing an trying to persuade Anatoly that Freddy is not as good as he used to be. Great performance throughout with excellent diction. Well Done.</p>
<p>Char 5: Freddie Trumper played by: Neil Parker</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Another strong performance for me, Neil gave a strong vocal performance his Pity the Child was one of the highpoints of the show. I did not like his costume in Act Two though which looked very messy to me. Appraiser 2: Dislikeable character which Neil portrayed. Then you leant what has happened in his past so you began to understand. In fact he was treated so badly as a child, like Florence, you could sort of understand where he was coming from. This was a lovely performance and when he sang about his past and it was acted out with feeling. I also liked him singing 'One Night in Bangkok'. Congratulations. Appraiser 3: I love how Neil gives Freddie that swagger. His Chess groupies in Merano given</p>

	<p>just the amount of charm and disdain they deserve! Chess isn't his only game – living the American Dream is the other. Neil shows us that when Freddie is at the top, he is living his best life, which makes his anger and hurt, partner, all the more rewarding, partner, when things go awry. Then we have another powerhouse vocal performance where Neil makes having such an amazing voice look effortless.</p>
<p>Char 6: Florence Vassy played by: Sophie Herrmann</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: This was the performance of the night for me. Beautifully played with so much feeling and it came from the heart. I will mention 'I know him so well' as it must be one of the most known songs in the show and Sophie (and Lauren) sang it so beautifully, I was in tears. Florence showed a range of emotions all of which made me really feel for her. This was truly a professional performance. Congratulations.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Sophie looked stunning in all her costume changes as Florence. A very difficult role with some powerful numbers to sing. I don't know if she was struggling with her voice as some timings weren't quite spot on and I felt she was really struggling with the reprise of Anthem. Well acted throughout.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: Yet another singing voice to blow us away. PODS, where do you find all these gorgeously talented people? Heaven Help My Heart and You and I were defining moments that Sophie knocks out of the park and then some. Sophie brings a truth and heart into the show via Florence that grips the audience and puts us through the emotional wringer. I wasn't crying. No. Not me.</p>
<p>Char 7: Walter DeCoursey played by: Paul Mellin</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Paul is always a joy to see on stage with PODS, and Chess was no exception. Bringing just the right amount of charm and smarm to Walter, another one of the pawns on the board playing to his own agenda. A believable character depiction here and Paul shows his duality perfectly.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: The scheming CIA Agent disguised as a TV Producer is a difficult role to play not having such powerful numbers as the other main characters. Paul did a good job of this, I did feel he missed his entrance on his final number with Florence which was a shame as this is a powerful segment of the show</p>
<p>Char 8: Veronica Wilson played by: Sally Mathias</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Sally gave me a full on out loud belly laugh with this performance. What a joy to watch. We have all seen those cheesy presenters on event TV and Sally channels them to perfection. What a hoot!</p>
<p>Char 9: Vernon Hale played by: Peter Knowles</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: These two characters (Veronica and Vernon) are not in the script as that simply says TV Announcer. Possibly added by the director for comic effect, I didn't think it was necessary.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: A solid turn and a great foil for Sally's Veronica. Totally splitting hairs here – but I think Peter could have taken Vernon a little further without going into caricature territory.</p>
<p>Char 10: Young Freddie played by: Austin Beasley</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Again, not an easy part for Austin as he had nothing to say. However he portrayed a lot of feeling and emotion when he could see what his father and mother were like. Well Done. Great job with the Chorus as well.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: A cameo from Austin, but one that drives the motivations for his adult counterpart. Austin gives us a lovely contrast to the brash portrayal from Neil. Great work from a very promising young performer.</p>
<p>Char 11: Freddie's Mother Played by Nikki Wilson</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: 'Mother' goes from total anguish, to utter glee when another new man enters her life gave me chills. Magnificent. It would be remiss of me not to mention Nikki in her various roles in the chorus while we are here. An absolute joy to watch whenever on stage, Nikki is an asset to the show.</p>
<p>Char 12 Svetlana Sergievskaya Played by: Lauren Farnham</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Poor Svetlana. Rocks up in the final quarter of the show and is then well and truly done over from all angles. Lauren really brings that out in her portrayal. She gives us everything we need to know in that first video clip – a loving and happy mother shooing away the cameras. By the time we get to You Know Him So Well, Lauren has given us a solid characterisation full of empathy. Svetlana is truly one of the pawns in this game, moved around the board by her husband, Molokov, the Americans and to a degree Florence too. Lauren adds every nuance that makes Svetlana's story heart-breaking.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: With the Character not appearing on stage until the second Act and going straight into some powerful ballads not an easy role. Lauren played it well. I am afraid the duet with Florence did not wow me as I thought it would, being one of the iconic numbers in the show.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: On for only a short time but made quite an impact. It must be so difficult to be the last main character on stage and have to sing such a well-known song but Lauren and Sophie really did an amazing job with 'I know him so well'. I felt for her as her husband had left her. Such an emotional part. Congratulations.</p>
<p>Char: Young Florence</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: Not an easy part for any young lady to play. Meryl did such a good job and</p>

<p>Vassy played by: Meryl Smith</p>	<p>although she had nothing to say you could tell what she was feeling. Well Done. Meryl also did a great job with the Chorus</p>
<p>Char; Everyone Else: Played by: Jim Pluck, Tom Lawthorn, Peter Knowles, Helen Taylor, Jacqui Hillier, Sarah Hurman, Paul Melin, Sally Mathias, Peter Knowles, Nikki Wilson, Peter Knowles, Tom Lawthorn. Haydn Manuell</p>	<p>I do hope I've included everyone else here as they all deserve a mention but I am unable to write about the individual and I apologise. Every in this production worked as a Team and all did an exceptional job. No, it wasn't perfect but it wasn't far from it. WELL DONE EVERYONE.</p>
<p>Chorus</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: The use of the chorus brings us a totally immersive experience here. From chequered flags flying above our heads, a Chinese dragon parading the aisles, the Bangkok dancing girls or the American marketeers, this chorus invites us to play along and makes us feel welcome – we are not mere spectators but pawns of the king as much as any of the characters. This is the chorus' job and they smashed it.</p> <p>On this I will mention some of the smaller roles too. Peter as Freddie's father & Tom as Mrs Trumper's lover, as brief an appearance on stage as in Freddie's life, both giving us the right emotional beats to flesh out Freddie's story.</p> <p>Special shout out to the always glorious Emma Dennett as the last marketeer hooting and hollering down the centre aisle as she bounces out. It's the little touches like this that elevate a show from good to great. Somehow, they always seem to be Emma! Love it!</p> <p>Appraiser 2: The ensemble worked really well, some lovely singing after a shaky start on the evening I was there, it was obvious that each and everyone of them were enjoying what they were doing.</p>
<p>Summing up</p>	<p>Appraiser 1: I really enjoyed this performance by PODS. There were some standout performances for me, but everyone tried their best and looked to be enjoying themselves. A fresh production with some lovely added pieces by the director. Well done all.</p> <p>Appraiser 2: Chess wasn't just a joy to watch, it was an honour to feel a part of. Good luck topping this with whatever you do next! You've set yourselves an exceptionally high bar.</p> <p>Appraiser 3: A production that would have looked on any professional stage and I would like to congratulate each and every one of them for a night I will remember for some time. I cannot praise it enough – hope I haven't gone over the top. Well Done and Congratulations PODS for an excellent show.</p> <p>MODERATOR'S COMMENTS: I can only support what the appraisers have said. A fantastic show, great musically, smashing harmonies, fab choreography and with the support of an amazing technical and imaginative production team. They all enhanced a very slick, very professional production. You clearly worked so hard on this – that Rock Choir! Wow! Be proud. It was exceptionally good.</p>