



NICK BRANNAM  
DIRECTOR | CHOREOGRAPHER

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PRODUCTION	<i>Young Frankenstein</i>
COMPANY	EBOS Musical Theatre
PUBLISHED BY	NODA
DATE OF PUBLICATION	3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2022

## Show Report

### Overall Production Impression

Mel Brook's *Young Frankenstein* was a brilliant comic 1974 film and a successful West Musical in 2017 and is a riotous parody of not only the 1930's black and white horror movies but also a pastiche of several other musical styles. The stage version seems to borrow a little from the classic *Rocky Horror Picture Show* with its adult content and burlesque characters. It is a perfect adult amateur musical show in which the cast and audience can have great fun and the EBOS team throw themselves full heartedly into the production to create a first-class show.

The leading characters all get their moments to delight the audience with comic turns and strong musical numbers and grab the opportunities to deliver with gusto and skill while the ensemble appear as Students, Passengers, Villagers, and a chorus line revelling in creating the very different personas and reacting to the action. The director and dance captain brings this all together to create some excellent set piece routines.

Technically it is a well accomplished show too with a wonderful two-level set with revolve, very well integrated special sound effects, atmospheric lighting and an excellent nine-piece band in the pit. The elements are smoothly delivered in a quick paced well-balanced show with some laugh out loud moments and sending you home with a smile on your face in a perfect antidote to a cold autumn night and depressing news flow! Well done to everyone involved.

## Cast

**Stuart Hayllor** leads the cast as Frederick Frankenstein, pronounced "Fronkensteen" and sets the tone from the start. There is more than a hint of the originator of the part Gene Wilder in his portrayal and he rightly plays it dead seriously as if he believes the action despite some of the ludicrous business. He has a strong stage presence and good voice and reacts very well with the other characters with his facial expressions. There is great clarity in the way he puts over the songs from the tongue twister "the Brain" to the vaudeville style double act "Together again for the first time". He is at his best reacting to behaviours of his two female partners in the brilliant "Please don't touch me" with Elizabeth and the hilariously naughty "Roll in the hay" with Inga. Holds centre stage with consummate ease.

Elizabeth, his fiancée, is played with full on comic energy by **Laura Thain** with a lovely contrast between the character in the saucy and indignant "Don't touch me" and then outrageously transformed by an offstage incident in the powerful operatic "Deep love" leaving us in no doubt as to what happened in the wings! Great Fun.

Inga, his assistant, is played with a very sultry confident air by **Emily Hobbs** with just hint of a Barbara Windsor irresistible charm which quickly seduces the Doctor in "Roll in the hay". Cleverly staged with the two upstage horses, she throws herself uninhibited into the number to create a show highlight including the climatic yodelling. She shows her dance training as she moves elegantly and gracefully around the stage throughout. A very strong performance.

Igor, the hunchback is perhaps the best comic creation of the show and is hilariously played in a stooped limping inanely grinning presence by **Adrian McDougall**. He knowingly engages the audience at every appearance with his tongue in cheek delivery. The "adlibs" about the cost of living were a witty and clever addition. You can't fail to enjoy his double act with the Doctor in "Together again for the first time", the comic business outside the Brain depository, or his reactions in "Surprise". A comic tour de force.

Frau Blucher, the housekeeper, is another great comic creation captured well by **Anna McCormack** with a ludicrous accent but a very well judged and paced delivery taking her time on each line to good effect. Her wonderful Cabaret style routine with a chair in "He was my boyfriend" was delivered with great control of her smouldering passion and tragic loss. In the comedy race she GALLOPED past the WINNING POST.

Inspector Kemp, the local policeman, was also very well created by **Gareth Watkins**, helped by some magnificent whiskers, eyepatch, and wonderful German helmet. It was a wonderful characterisation, a bumbling authority figure, maintaining well his stiff arm and leg as he marched in pursuit of the monster. He was well supported in the search by Kier Burst as Ludwig.

**James Lole** had the challenge of creating the abnormal seven-foot-tall gorilla, The Monster and portraying the transformation from stiff grunting grotesque to elegant well-spoken hero. His facial reactions were excellent in his early scenes pointing each gag effectively, but the costume of raised boots and bald skull cap were too obvious and a distraction from a believable Monster.

The cameo of Harold the Hermit was played by **Jules Gribble** who sung the plaintiff "Please send me someone" very well although seemed troubled by a loose beard throughout! The business with the uncorked bottle and the soup ladle were weakened by the absence of any actual liquid.

The small role of Bertram Batram was played with exaggerated comic reactions by **Archie Watkins** making the most of being briefly centre stage in his first EBOS production

The large Ensemble were excellent with individual characterisations and well-choreographed and executed numbers in "The Brain", "Please Don't Touch me", "Welcome to Transylvania" and the Finale "Together Again". They looked like they were all having fun, reacted well together, and sounded very good. They helped create the scenes and used the stage and auditorium space well. The two white horses in "Roll in the hay" were a neat addition to the scene.

## Creatives

**Nick Brannam** has done an excellent job in staging the production which looked and sound very good and makes the most of the multiple comic opportunities and characterisations. The use of the auditorium for exits and entrances, in the "Putting on the ritz" scene and an ensemble person from the pit adds to the engagement with the audience in keeping with the theatricality of the show. The use of the two levels on stage and the black drop gauze and red half tabs provided variety in setting and sped up the scene changes. The white screens for the shadow sequences worked very effectively and added to the fun reminiscent of both the pantomime mirror routine and the Rocky Horror Picture show love scene. The Ensemble groupings and interactions were very well integrated into the show. In several sequences there were suitable nods to movie and theatrical motifs which seemed appropriate. Overall, a very well executed production. The choreography with support from the Dance Captain, **Abi Burrows** was varied and interesting enhancing the scenes and songs as in "The Brain", "Please don't touch me", "Welcome to Transylvania" and "Putting on the ritz".

**Duncan Bruce**, again excelled in the set design with **Nick Brannam** and in the Programme design. Both were of the highest quality. The door/bookcase revolve was excellent (if occasionally a little jerky!) , the two-level set added immensely to the staging with the sliding walls providing a smooth transition to the detailed setting of the Laboratory. The Hay cart made a perfect setting for the song. The small signage added witty elements like the reference to the Queen Mary Shelley and Track 29.

Stage management under **Andrew Cooper** worked efficiently to arrange smooth quick transitions between scenes and striking the small trucks and settings quietly. I did see one of stage crew trapped behind the outer flat of the Hermit's truck for the scene whether to speed up the exit or caught by an early light change I was not sure!

Lighting by **Marc Hopkins** was atmospheric and appropriate with good use of the follow spots although occasionally a principal's face was in darkness and the projection of the show logo and fireworks were very effective. There were some good uses of down spots to illuminate areas of the stage like the desk.

The sound design and mix by **Tom Horrox** was outstanding with a very good balance between the vocals and the band and some wonderfully integrated sound effects like the brain squash, the lab power handles, the repeated horses neigh's and the Inspectors limb movements. I don't think I missed any of the words which makes such a difference when watching a show.

**Trevor Defferd** was in position early rehearsing his conducting as we took our seats and energetically and enthusiastically lead the 9-piece band to create an excellent musical accompaniment throughout. There was an enjoyable mix of musical styles from vaudeville, through burlesque to the Boyfriend, then Cabaret and Barber shop quartet to Chorus line. The use of the violin and French horn on stage by actors was covered well from the pit. Though I was unfamiliar with many of the tunes it was easy to enjoy the rich sound from the band.

**Helen Prior's** prop list was varied well sourced. The skeleton in the first scene, the large book, the brains, the heads on the shelves and the frying pan in Hermits shed provided good visual gags. As noted, I would have preferred to have seen a liquid for the soup and wine from the bottle although I apprentice the risks from spills on stage.

There was a good use of wigs and make up by **Nick Brannam** and **Jude Ifould** with the villagers missing teeth and dirtied up, excellent whiskers on the Inspector and cleverly enhanced cleavage. It was good to see whole chorus line with same hairstyle in "Putting on the ritz" although as noted the Monster's wig looked far too artificial.

The costumes under **Natalie Hayllor** and her team were uniformly good with a very well-dressed Frederick, a suitably stern and dour Frau Blucher, an elegant and power dressed (and undressed) Elizabeth, a sultry and seductive Inga, and a wonderfully evocative Igor. The Hermits tunic looked a little too clean and could have been dirtied up more. The Monster's shoes could have been better dressed to hide the large soles.

I missed the professional version of this show in West End although I have happy memoires of watching the original film as a Marty Feldman fan, but I was delighted to watch this excellent production which was another wonderful showcase of the EBOS talents full of lovely singing and great comic moments and staged with great case and wit. Congratulations on another successful production.

Thank you

Nick Humby - NODA Representative - London Region - District 14