

BUGSY MALONE

Julie Eagleton at the Queens Theatre

This is the National Youth Music Theatre's first foray into the West End for a commercial run and what better vehicle to parade its wealth of talent than this. Alan Parker wrote and directed the hit movie *Bugsy Malone* in 1975, using an entire cast of children and, with his collaboration and approval, NYMT have used a cast of players who are all aged 16 or under for this production.

The Queens Theatre was transformed into the legendary speakeasy with an impressive design: grand sweeping staircase, art deco features, a central, large, glass ball throwing its kaleidoscope of light across a well-stocked bar, backed by the formidable New York skyline – all the ingredients of a popular jazz club in the American prohibition era. It was totally refreshing to see a stage full of teenagers, lacking any inhibitions, doing what children do best – dressing up and acting like adults. I had almost forgotten what fun 'splurge' guns were until Dandy Dan's Gang let rip in the speakeasy, covering everyone with white foam.

Bobby Bethel, aged 12, played the sharp-suited Bugsy Malone, with Leanne Connelly, aged 10, giving a gutsy performance, as Blousey Brown, reminiscent of Jodie Foster in the movie. As this is a true ensemble piece, there really is no star but the young performer who

really stood out was 16 year old Paul Lowe who played the character of Fat Sam. Sporting what looked like two extra large cushions stuffed down the back of his trousers, he waddled around, shouting orders and splurging everyone in sight, looking very much like a young Oliver Hardy. Of course, the music by Paul Williams is wonderful and most of the

BY ALAN PARKER

Composer Paul Williams

Directors Russell Labey,
Jeremy James Taylor

Choreographer Kay Shepherd
Designer Gary Underwood

Musical Director John Pearson

Sound Designer Thomas Ashbee

Lighting Designer Richard House

Cast Charlotte Aldridge, Yusuf Altin, Sam Archer, Dean Atta, Elizabeth Avis, Simon Barnum, Katie Beauchamp, Daniel Beckett, Jamie Bell, Janee Bennett, Bobby Bethel, Adebayo Bolaji, James Bourne, Mark Boyle, Danielle Burns, Charlotte Burt, Katie Byles, Leanne Connelly, Philip Cornford, Phillip Cumbus, Susan Dale, Michael Diana, Rikki Doughty, Jason Dowling, Chris Dyer, Olivia Ferrer, Hayley Fitzpatrick, Matt Fraser, Ryan Gage, Victoria Gibbins, Katie Gill, Lauren Godbold Rudolf Gordon, Lewis Greenslade, Amy

performers in the orchestra are under 13. What is unique about the NYMT is that it is open to all children from the ages of 11 to 19 who show passion and talent for musical theatre, and this was reflected here as children were cast from all over Great Britain. If the peals of laughter in the theatre were anything to go by, then this show was a real winner with the audience. Co-director Jeremy James Taylor was quoted in the programme as having reservations about this venture purely because Shaftesbury Avenue was unknown territory so far in the company's history. This run of *Bugsy Malone* will have helped alleviate any future tears. ☐

Grima, Charlene Hammer, Katie Harper, Chris Herriott, Andrea Hyams, Sonny Hyams, Francesca Jackson, Adam Jenkins, Michael Jibson, Jeremy Joyce, Cush Jumbo, Simon Karaiskos, Susanna Khumalo, Nana Kumi, Ben Lockyer, Paul Lowe, Alistair McCalla, Scott McGivern, Kirsty McQuater, Chris Meehan, David Parker, Sean Parkins, Malinda Parris, Michael Perryman, Vicky Phillips, Stuart Piper, Marc Pickering, Stuart Price, Jessica Smart, Sheridan Smith, Warren Sollars, Giovanni Spano, Hannah Spearritt, Gavin Spencer, Michael Sturges, Jeannette Eva Stepniewska Sutton, David Tan, Barnaby Thompson, Eveline Verdigal, Richard Webb, Laura Whittle, Shean Williams, Tara Williams, Mark Willshire, Simone Withers.

Orchestra Peter Wood, Tom Bruton, Alexis Elia, Adam Jukes, George Bartle, Leo Edwards, Laura Kennedy, Rebecca Sewell, Tina Jacobs Lim, Lucie Eckhardt, Alexandra Kennedy, Kiran Evans, Ben Barnes, Ben Gray, Antonio Fortin, Daniel Wheatley, John Pearson, Daniel Jackson, Andrew Smith

A Ring Of Roses

Julie Eagleton at the Savoy Theatre

Radio 2's Derek Jameson proclaimed: "There can't be anything to match this outside the West End" when he saw this amateur production of *A Ring Of Roses*.

The play takes place in August and September, 1665, when the Black Plague claimed the lives of 50,000 people. A small farming village outside of London decide to take action against the disease and evacuate all the village children, placing them on a solitary hill to try to isolate them.

The Starlite Theatre Group were formed in November 1991 by Darren Vallier who wrote the book, music and lyrics, as well as directing the performance. *A Ring Of Roses* had previously been performed at The Connaught Theatre in Worthing and showed such promise that it was decided to give the play a showcase in London.

There were some incredibly strong performances, most notably from Tania Newton who played one of the Mothers in the village. Previously she has appeared in *West Side Story*,

Madame Butterfly, *42nd Street* and *Annie* and her experience showed, particularly when she sang the song *Where Are You Now?*, a beautiful ballad in which she gave her all.

Louis Craig who played the children's self-appointed leader, Peter, gave the performance of the evening. It is hard to believe that he is just 15 as he struts around the stage with such a commanding presence. His character is also somewhat of a bully who gets the children to do his bidding most of the time, with a voice and body language reminiscent of the Artful

BOOK, MUSIC & LYRICS BY DARREN VALLIER

Director	Darren Vallier
Musical Director	Paul Heard
Sound	Brian Glover, Hiycon Ltd
Lighting Designer	Jonathan Richardson
Set Design	Jaimie Todd, Jane Churchill

Company	Naomi Slater, Tania Newton, Kathryn Flood, Jason Ashdown, Lucy Newton, Becky Clifford, Mark Yexley, George Kelly, Katy Geary, Charlotte Gaskell, Jodie
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Dodger in *Oliver!*. Most certainly one to watch for the future.

I wished that more could have been done with the scenery which looked bland and, considering there were no major changes, the backdrops should have been visually much more stimulating. Having said that, all of the scenes with the three old hags were colourful as they were wheeled out onto the stage on a barrow laden with pans, crockery, multi-coloured ribbons, bits of furniture and anything else that may be a useful addition for one of their notorious spells.

The idea for a musical is a good one but it needs to be expanded, with some subplot to fill it out as there were some patchy scenes, lacking sufficient material and direction. A gallant effort by all and with expansion and a cash injection, a musical that could go places. *REP*

Harrop, Louis Craig, Chris Herriott, Phillip Cornford, James Pickard, Gary Lynn, Nick Main, Michele Baker, Lizzie Brown, Louise Dainty, Kelly Draper, Robert Elmore, Richard Godwin, Laura Gold, Tasha Gold, Candice Gregory, Charlotte Jones, Cally Laundon, Amy Lyner, Thomas Lyner, Alex Lynch-White, Fiona McBride, Anna McCallum, Katie Neiman, Michelle Newton, Liliana Noble, Rob Piatt, Nicole Pickard, Jemma Salmon, Crystal Skinner, Katie Warner, Adrienne Wenstone.

Skylight

Julie Eagleton at the Vaudeville Theatre

This play had its premiere at the Royal National Theatre in May 1995. The cast starred Michael Gambon and Lia Williams and, after a successful run in London, it crossed over to Broadway. Now back two years on, Bill Nighy and Stella Gonet take on the roles of Tom and Kyra.

Tom is a fortysomething hungry capitalist, a restaurateur who is still trying to come to terms with his wife's death from cancer a year earlier. Not only do the pangs of bereavement fill his day but also that of guilt. Tom and the twentysomething Kyra had had a six year affair when she was a former employee and actually living as a house guest with the couple. His wife eventually found out and Kyra left abruptly without any explanation. From that day onwards, the two lost contact until Tom's son pays an unexpected visit to Kyra to bring the news of his mother's death and, in doing so, tries to reconcile the couple. *Skylight* is a political play, highlighting society's evils, with great emphasis on the class system. To counteract Tom's capitalist leanings, Kyra is a strong idealist who is making a pittance as a school teacher in a rough London neighbourhood.

Having once lived the high life with Tom and his wife, she has now settled for a shabby flat with no central heating, but seems content with her lifestyle and career, much to the disgust of Tom. The set shows a living room with an open kitchen, complete with a nasty old boiler and a tiny heater, symbolising the frugal approach to life which she has now chosen.

Bill Nighy turns in a magnificent performance as a man who hits the whisky bottle just to get through the day and so plays the part in a semi-drunken stupor throughout, his shock of blonde hair becoming more

tousled as the play proceeds, looking like a deranged professor. He nervously paces around the flat, flicks open books, inspects objects and lifts covers, subconsciously trying to find evidence of Kyra's love life. This is a broken man, certainly not financially as he likes to brag about his cars, restaurants and bank balance, but emotionally he is bankrupt. His son refers to him as 'Citizen Kane with yellow pages' as he spends hours flicking through its contents trying to bring meaning to his life.

When Kyra invites him to stay to dinner, a large chunk of the interaction takes place across a worktop in the kitchen, while she hastily prepares dinner, and he moans about the lack of central heating and suggests they eat out. The standing at opposite sides of the worktop represents the chasm between the present values that they have chosen. Even their dress sense widens the gap, Tom in a sharp suit, if somewhat ruffled by his manic pacings, and coat which he refuses to move because of the temperature in the flat, whilst she is wearing old, unflattering jogging bottoms and a throw wrapped around herself for warmth.

The character of Kyra is far too self-righteous but Stella Gonet, better known for her long running role in the series *The House Of Elliot*, manages to bring some warmth to the role. Kyra raves about the injustices in the world and Tom replies with the curt response, "There's always been injustice but you've gone looking for it". He admits that he works with 'shits and shafters' all day and consequently makes no apologies for it. Politics aside, this is also a poignant love story. One senses that the audience secretly hopes that the two can rekindle their relationship but also are aware that the odds are stacked highly against them. *R&P*

BY DAVID HARE

<i>Director</i>	Richard Eyre	<i>Kyra Hollis</i>	Stella Gonet
<i>Designer</i>	John Gunter	<i>Edward Sergeant</i>	Theo Fraser
<i>Lighting</i>	Mark Jonathan		Steele
<i>Sound</i>	Freya Edwards	<i>Tom Sergeant</i>	Bill Nighy