

Remember Your First Time

Yes, I very fondly remember my first time seeing Andrew Lloyd Webber's [*The Phantom of the Opera*](#). It was on a Saturday afternoon in October 1990 at the Auditorium Theatre at Roosevelt University (ok... so I had to check the Stagebill for the official venue name) in Chicago the day after our marching band performed it's halftime show featuring the music of the phenomenon.... complete with Phantom masks and capes. Tonight, as the family gathered at one of the first high school productions ever produced, I was taken back to that day 20 years ago. In the row in front of me sat a woman who turned around and asked if I was one of Emily Curtis' students. I very proudly stated that indeed I was and still am. The woman (who was a dear friend) told me that Ma2 spoke very highly of me on several occasions. We both told how much we dearly miss her. I knew that I was in for a memorable, magical evening.

I do not believe that I have ever seen a professional production of any show before I saw a high school production of the same. It has been many years since I have seen Phantom on stage (the movie does not do the musical justice AT ALL) so there were some things that I did not remember. But everything about tonight's production was shockingly gorgeous.

The set design was phenomenal. My favorite piece was the bridge used during the "Don Juan Triumphant" scene. It honestly looked like it could have been used as the barricade in *Les Misérables*. The graveyard scene ("Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again") was dark and mysterious with just a faint glow of moonlight (but no fireballs thrown by the Phantom ☹).

I was also impressed with the illusion of the Phantom and Christine's journey to the lair beyond the lake.

The young thespians on stage when PHENOMENAL. The leads both began taking voice lessons a year ago in preparation for auditions and it certainly showed. The title character had an

extraordinary range. I was on stage with the young man in my first Village Players production (*Meet Me in St. Louis*) and he has come A LONG WAY since then. Every time I have seen Phantom, I measure the quality of the production on one thing: the amount of goosebumps I get when he sings his signature song "Music of the Night." Needless to say, the high school JUNIOR nailed it!

The actress playing the role of Christine in ANY show must have a wickedly outrageous voice. The runs in tonight's delivery of "Think of Me" were crazy good.

I must say that my least favorite character in the show is the third leg of the triangle: Raoul, Vicomte de Changy. He always seems to me to be a whiner. But again, a fine performance.

NOW for the real stars of the show: Msrs. Firmin and Andre, the theatre owners. They are the comic relief that holds the show together and their timing as well as their voices were impeccable. The outrageous "Notes" and "Prima Donna" pieces in which there are like 50 melodies at one time (ok... not THAT many) were handled very nicely. In younger days, I would have so gone out for the big two roles; however, after a little high school show that I was in (not a post about my on stage experiences), I definitely know which roles I am so suited for.

If I had one complaint, it is what could not be done in this production. Do not go to be blown away by HUGE theatrical spectacle. Some of the big stage pieces simply are not possible on a stage and budget of a small school and most are there (just no fireballs). Yet, if any school in my little corner of the world could pull it off, it was this one at the most glorious setting we have to offer.

My 6 year old nephew's favorite scene: "the dummy who dropped from the ceiling on the noose." Ok, that was enough for him

who slept through the last 10 minutes.

Yes, a small school CAN produce extraordinary things. Thank you to the lady in front of me for taking me back 20 years and making me remember how special my own "Angel of Music" is to me. Emily would have been ecstatic!