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## National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

Society : Maidenhead Musical Comedy Society  
Production : **Young Frankenstein**  
Date : Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023  
Venue : Kenton Theatre  
Report by : Nick Humby

### Show Report

#### Overall Production Impression

Mel Brooks Young Frankenstein is an excellent vehicle for amateur musical theatre societies with its wonderful comic characters, varied musical pastiches and delightful parody of old-fashioned horror movies. It inevitably invites comparisons to the stars of the 1974 film and needs performers who can whole heartedly embrace the outlandish characters and musical numbers with skill. Maidenhead Musical Comedy Society is fortunate to not only have strength in depth but leads who worked exceedingly well together with distinctive well-defined personas.

The shows slick staging using full back cloth projections was very effective especially in the exterior scenes with some well-crafted practical staging of the Hay cart, Bookcase, Hermit's hovel, and Monster's cave as centre pieces of key scenes. The costumes too were very good especially Igor, Frau Bulcher, Kemp and the Ensemble and a wonderful seventies wig for Frankenstein. It made for a very good-looking setting for the show.

The choreography of the big musical numbers provides show stopping opportunities that are certain to bring a smile to all the audience and MMCS delivered them with excellent routines for the *Brain*, *Please don't touch me*, *It could work*, *Transylvania Mania* and *Putting on the ritz* . The combination of strong casting, good staging, and attractive choreography together with an excellent musical execution makes for a first-class fun production for cast and audience.



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## Cast

**Martin Selman** was magnificent as Frederick Frankenstein, pronounced Fronkensteen, from his first appearance as he turns on a chair in the lecture room to reveal his wonderful Seventies wig and moustache to his grand finale. He fully inhabited the role and captured the comic delight of the character's originator, Mel Brooks. He set the tone well with his delivery of *The Brain*, captured his lustful inner self in *Please don't touch me*, and then settled into a wonderful comic partnership with the other central characters in such songs as *Roll in the hay* and *It could work*. There was good comic business with the revolving bookcase, and he handled the dramatic brain transmission and hanging scene convincingly.

**Ellie Duncombe** was a delight as the haughty Elizabeth Benning, and you felt you wanted to see more of this character in the first half. She captured the aloof temptress well with a marvellous expressive face and dominated the stage in her two big numbers *Please don't touch me* and *Surprise* before showing a completely different wild side with great comic touch in *Ah sweet mystery of life* and then in the sultry passionate *Deep Love*. A great characterisation.

**Dominic Belcher** followed up last years success with another excellent performance as Igor with wonderful physicality and fully embodied the spirit of Marty Feldman as he scampered around the stage. His light of feet Vaudeville routines were a joy with a brilliant introduction in *Together again for the first time* and then the comical routine of *It could work*. A marvellous comic creation.

**Emily Johnson** was an absolute delight as the vibrant sexy Inga delivering all the saucy innuendo and slinky physicality with wonderful confidence in her numbers *Roll in the hay* and *Listen to your heart* and wrapping her legs around Frederick to great comic effect in both songs. An irresistible performance.



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**Sarah Seabrook** had enormous fun playing the gothic housekeeper Frau Bulcher with a dry Germanic accent and stern looks but then bursting into hilarious Cabaret parody with the outrageous breathless *He vas my boyfriend* which was a show highlight.

The four leads were excellent together in the routine *It could work*.

**Scott Kitson** made a very stiff upright Monster communicating well through his physicality, a lop-sided mouth, and a few grunts before the transformation after the brain transmission into the lucid scientist. His set piece moments were very well done breaking out through the audience at end Act 1, interacting with the Hermit in Act 2 and then leading the showstopping dance in *Putting on the ritz*. He made a very loveable monster.

**Charlie Fidler** looked every inch the draconian Inspector Kemp, maintained his stiff leg well and used the false arm to good effect. He led the barber shop *Welcome to Transylvania* well.

**Paul Freeman** was also very good in the cameo role of The Hermit delivering the sad lament *Please send me someone* with a gentle ease before engaging wonderfully with The Monster with the soap, mug, and candle to produce a well-done comic sketch. His wild wig and grey eyes certainly assisted the characterisation.

The small additional roles as the Students and villagers Bartram (**Kieran Jones**), Felix (**Martin Bennett**) and Ludwig (**Fraser Motion**) each had their cameo comic reaction moments. **Charlie Small** and **Emma Connelly** added a touch of cartoonish nonsense as the silhouette horses adding to the comic scene on the hay cart.

The Ensemble (**Martin Bennett, Hannah Bolton, Janet Chidley, Emma Connelly, Glinnie Freeman, Naomi Hennessey, Peter Higley, Kieran Jones, Nathan Jones, Rebecca Kolb, Fraser Motion, Pip Olding, Emma Sanders and Charlie Small**) were very well drilled in the big numbers with excellent choreography in *the Brain* using the clipboard to good effect and a very good



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tap number *in Puttin on the Ritz*. They were very well dressed as the villagers with a lovely range of weapons in *He's loose* to add to the scene.

## **Creatives**

**Louise Tait** demonstrated a real love of the genre and comic style which drew heavily from the original film but fitted beautifully on the Kenton stage. It never looked overcrowded, and all the comic moments and outrageous innuendo was beautiful pointed. Each performer established and maintained a clear characterisation which was complementary to the others and created wonderfully set piece moments. The Ensemble were well grouped to add to the creative pictures. I would have liked to have seen some business connecting the monster to the power source when he was brought alive but overall, this was a very well-paced joyful send up of classic horror films.

The choreography by **Lucinda Belcher** was varied, appropriate and drew inspiration from the many musical sources. The Vaudeville routines were brilliant comic homages, the no holds dance felt fresh and new, the twenties flapper *Transylvania Mania* was lively and fun, and of course the *Puttin on the ritz* number put a smile on everyone's face. The Ensemble were very well drilled and together with good groupings and the Principals, were all excellent in their dances.

Musical Director **Neil Matthews** and his eight-piece band hidden under the stage had done a very good job working on the many songs with the lead principals and Ensemble and the quality of the singing was outstanding. Every one of the musical numbers had been well rehearsed. The band accompaniment was excellent giving great support to the performers and complementing the singers very well with the music well balanced, never overpowering the singers.

**Alicia Walker and the crew** handled the multiple furnishing and props changes very efficiently with only occasional over long gaps between scenes. A lab trolley was left on for the Hermit scene but generally the setting were slickly handled and looked great. It was odd that there was a reference to a portrait that was not visible in the set.



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**Matt Smith's** sound was a very well-balanced mix with some excellent sound effects like the storm and heartbeat while **Craig Howard** and **Hugh Legh's** lighting design was effective and well illuminated the performers. Occasionally the full stage light bleached out the lower third of the excellent projections which as a shame and projected scene changes seemed to be slightly delayed showing previous scene when lights came up. A tighter lighting of the hay cart might have been more effective than the whole empty stage.

Hair and Make up by **Sue and Rob King** was perfect with Igor's white face , the Monsters's green face and the excellent wig for Frederick, all helping the characterisations immensely. The costumes too led by **Lynne Deane and John Wesson** looked amazing with Kemp's wonderful evocative Inspectors uniform, wonderful Austrian Ensemble costumes and appropriate good quality costuming for the main principals. The white fur stole was a comic masterstroke.

**Hilary Wilson's** props were well selected with a wonderful brain in a dome in the opening number, effective Hermits mug, great collection of weapons for the Ensemble and a good size hypodermic needle for sedation.

The Programme design had a very high-quality feel on expensive paper. Unfortunately, as the Programme does not the required 'An introduction to NODA' included it is not eligible for the programme awards.

This was a superb production which was great fun and highly entertaining to watch with great comic moments and wonderful dances routines with a strong cast who sang well and sustained wonderful characterisations. Well done and I hope we don't need to wait so long until your next production!

Thank you

**Nick**

Nick Humby - NODA Representative - London Region - District 14