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The Sound of Music

London Palladium, London



This Rogers & Hammerstein classic is well-known and loved by those who saw the 1965 film starring Julie Andrews. But did you know it was based on a real story? Maria Von Trapp's book, *The Von Trapp Family Singers*, is the original inspiration and the story was first made in to the 1956 German film *Die Trapp-Familie* before being adapted for the stage with brand new songs, first performed on Broadway in 1959.

The current London revival of *The Sound of Music*, an Andrew Lloyd Webber production, started in 2006 and the part of Maria Von Trapp was famously won by Connie Fisher in the reality TV show *How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria?*.

Maria is training to become a nun in an abbey in Salzburg, Austria. An unruly girl who is starting to question her calling, she is sent away by her Abbess to work as a governess for a local family. Captain Von Trapp, a widower, is raising his seven children as if they were soldiers in his battalion, but things soon change when Maria arrives; music and laughter come back into the house.

Scared by her burgeoning feelings for Captain Von Trapp, Maria runs away back to the abbey in a panic, eventually returning to marry him. But life is never so simple, and Captain Von Trapp's stand against the Nazi regime gets them in to trouble and the whole family have to flee.

From its very opening, *The Sound Of Music* is an impressive show. Before the curtain rises, nuns march down each aisle holding candles and line up at the back of the theatre singing the 'Praeludium', a rumbling Gregorian chant. Back on stage a large, suspended moving disc represents the mountain near the abbey - its motion allows characters to walk across it at certain points in the show and the impressive lighting changes the atmosphere and the time of day quickly and effectively.

Backdrops for other scenes arrive by moving walkway, from the stone walls of the abbey to the elaborate interior of the Von Trapp mansion. The most striking scenes are the most simple, though. When Nazi flags hang down during the family's festival performance towards the end of the show, and SS soldiers look out in to the audience holding guns, it's hard not to shudder with recognition and wonder for a moment whether this is getting too real.

With such well-known songs, this show has an edge on the music side of proceedings. The hidden orchestra are impeccable and the vocal arrangements sound great - even the more minor characters have lovely voices, which isn't always the case.

Forget the reality TV tag - Connie Fisher is marvellous. With more than a touch of Julie Andrews in her singing tone she fits the bill perfectly, bringing bags of personality and a measured calm to the part of Maria. She's immensely likeable and interacts tenderly with the other characters, particularly the children. Another bright star in the cast is Amy Lennox as Liesl, with a lovely, pure tone and a feisty nature; she portrays the frustration of being not a child yet not quite a woman brilliantly.

The quality cast make the show a delight to watch, from the noble Simon Burke (Captain Von Trapp), and the caring Margaret Preece (The Mother Abbess) right down to the younger Von Trapp children, with their cute expressions and pretty singing. Their performance of 'Edelweiss' in particular was very moving, and they got the biggest cheer of all during the curtain calls - well deserved.

The Sound Of Music is fun and entertaining but, more than that, its compelling real life story and fantastic cast make for a rollercoaster of emotions and a very special night indeed.

Cast List

Connie Fisher - Maria Rainer
Simon Burke - Captain Georg von Trapp
Margaret Preece - The Mother Abbess
Fiona Sinnott - Baroness Schraeder
Paul Grunert - Max Detweiler
Luke Fredericks - Rolf Gruber
Amy Lennox - Liesl
Edward Parry - Friedrich
Megan Polston - Louisa
Ryan Heenan - Kurt
Ashley Clish - Brigitta
Rosie Lumbard - Marta
Jessica Daugirda - Gretl

Directed By

Jeremy Sams

Reviewed October 2007 by Laura Kidd