

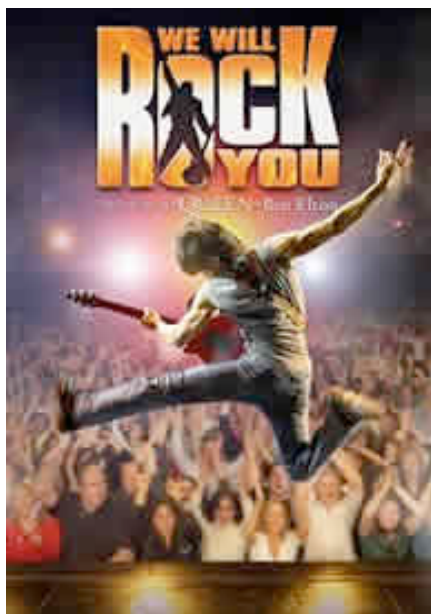
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We Will Rock You

Dominion Theatre, London



In a futuristic world where musical instruments are banned, computer companies produce bland tunes performed by anodyne boy and girl bands and free thinking is a crime punishable by brute force. But resistance is growing in the form of the Bohemians, rebels who believe there was once a time called The Rhapsody, when cool kids formed bands and wrote their own songs. Picking up bits of jumbled information from the past, the Bohemians piece together their own version of musical history, where the Hairy One's mighty axe lies buried deep in rock, waiting for someone to release it and bring real music back to Planet Mall once more.

It was only a matter of time before Queen's marvellous back catalogue was dusted off and used as the basis for a musical, and *We Will Rock You* is cleverly put together. Eschewing a straight up Freddy Mercury biog, the main strength of the show is the decision to use a fictional storyline, peppered with all those fantastic tunes. The Dominion buzzes with excitement every night, packed not with the usual theatre-going crowd but more families and people of all ages and styles. The droves are drawn in by the songs - well placed and grandly staged - but the story works well too, obviously drawing

parallels with the modern pop industry and getting many laughs with the Bohemians' misapprehension of certain historical musical facts.

The band are brilliant, though with Brian May and Roger Taylor as musical supervisors you'd expect nothing less. Hidden up in the wings on stage right, they get a chance to be seen towards the end and seem like a lovely bunch of chaps, greying rockers who seem overjoyed to get to play this fantastic music every night. The vocal talents in the cast are remarkable too; while the songs are necessarily performed in a musical theatre style, most of them are done on a grand scale with some impressive vocal acrobatics and a light show to match.

What becomes confusing as the show goes on is where Ben Elton is really coming from with the script. The female leads are strong, feisty, sexual characters who are more than capable of looking after themselves, and a big deal is made about putting the petulant, sexist Galileo in his place.

But where Elton gives with one hand he takes away with the other. A scene where Killer Queen gives orders on a videophone while simultaneously having a bikini wax (with accompanying "eager beaver" comments, of course) is bizarre - her role as imposing baddie is undermined by making a joke out of her femininity.

Likewise, Scaramouche's triumphant finale is only complete when she performs a forward roll to show off a Union Jack on her rump. It smacks of playing to the lowest common denominator, allowing women their supposedly strong and independent roles within the story but appeasing the masses by poking fun at them on the sly - surely an unnecessary move in the 21st century.

Some of the usual performers are absent tonight, causing a bit of a cast reshuffle. This largely works fine, though Jon Boydon is unimpressive as Galileo. While he himself can't be blamed for the whingy, whiney character, his fake American accent and unsteady, nasal vocal performances jar on the nerves. Marianne Benedict, however, is magnificent as Killer Queen, owning the stage in leopard print and big hair and raising the roof with a fantastically powerful voice. Sabrina Alouche is wonderful too; the most likeable onstage presence of the evening with one of the biggest voices.

On the whole, *We Will Rock You* the musical is a strange beast. The songs, the band, the lights and a good cast are all present and correct but the storyline starts to seem more and more arbitrary as the night goes on. The show's a great excuse for a mass

singalong though, and the inclusion of a snippet of Freddie Mercury's voice during 'One Vision' almost brings a tear to the eye. What a tribute to the man, and to the band. I leave the theatre all smiles, rushing home to put on my battered copy of *A Night At The Opera* after a most enjoyable evening's entertainment.

Cast List

Julian Littman - Pop
Sabrina Aloueche - Scaramouche
Jon Boydon - Galileo (usually played by Ricardo Alfonso)
Marianne Benedict - Killer Queen (usually played by Mazz Murray)
Craig Ryder - Khashoggi (usually played by Alex Bourne)
Lain Gray - Britney
Lucy Sinclair - Meat
Garry Lake - The Rebel Leader

Directed By

Ben Elton

Reviewed by Laura Kidd October 2007