

MTM:UK AWARDS NOMINATIONS

When considering the selection of nominated musicals in our five categories we started from the *basis that musical theatre can be viewed in terms of the noun 'theatre' and the adjective 'musical'* to describe shows which focus on character in action expressed through song and/or dance.

Rather than being a simple escape, it is perhaps the most complex form of theatrical synthesis and hence why so much of it fails to reach the aspirations of this most complex of forms.

In addition we wanted to measure the relative success of how a show balances the demands of inner dramatic tension with overt theatricality and convention.

Sadly there seem to be too many shows viewed which veer too far towards ostentatious display and appear self-indulgent or at the very least self-referential. Musical theatre can quickly become the beast that eats itself. This manifests itself in the worst kind of in-jokes with music and lyrics which are derivative in tone and style, and leaves shows prone to accusations of a too cynical commercialism.

Of course we all want to see shows do well in the market-place and there is no reason why a commercial view should not be the creative impulse from which a new musical springs.

It has been particularly interesting to note the strength of musical comedy this year in the 49 shows viewed, in particular aspirations to lyrical wit, and this is reflected in the nominations.

However the musical theatre potentially has more in common with the heightened verse, form and structure of Shakespeare than it does with televisual realism and can encompass the same range of large themes and ideas. In the context of a theatre filled with relatively small cast plays and often based in psychological realism, almost by default the musical has come to serve as the poetic, romantic, philosophical and moral theatre of our time. It has been rather alarming to note that in spite of some fine observational comedy, many shows have been more of a collection of comic skits held together with the flimsiest of narrative or thematic arcs and few have attempted to explore these larger concerns. Those that have all too often fail to find an expressive language up to the task, resorting instead to convention and cliché which they believe will achieve audience comfort and by supposition commercial appeal. As such some of the shows serve up a kind of generic 'musical theatre minestrone'.

We would therefore passionately implore writers to be adventurous in exploring worlds of real depth, inspiring idealism, passionate faith, romantic aspiration, noble heroism and genuine sentiment. More than anything else the musical theatre is one of overt emotionalism. It is also therefore responsible for using its emotional power carefully and for the greater good. Let us not work to seek personal approval, career advancement or indeed award nominations – these may be adjuncts to our achievements but our fundamental work must be in exploring the possibilities of our art. If we do not mediocrity is the only possible outcome.

Ultimately the two greatest weapons in the musical theatre are stillness and silence – we must earn the right to break them both.

DR NICK PHILLIPS – Co-chair of the Awards Panel.

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