MISS SAIGON

by

Boublil & Schonber

on

Thursday19th July 2018

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for this much anticipated return of the heart rending epic, and legendry musical, Miss Saigon. The show is presented by Cameron Mackintosh with music by Claude-Michel Schonberg, lyrics by Richard Maltby and Alain Boublil and directed by Laurence Connor.

The fifteen-piece orchestra is under the direction of Matthew J Loughran

I an Veryan and will be describing the first Act today with my colleague, Pam describing the second half. The show runs for two hours forty minutes including a twenty minute interval and finishes at 5.10

**Synopsis**

Miss Saigon is a powerful, visually stunning and emotionally charged adaptation of Puccini’s 1903 opera, Madame Butterfly, by the writers behind Les Miserables. Here, they have reframed Puccini’s tragic love story by setting it in Saigon during the final days of the Vietnam War. It centers around Kim, a destitute seventeen year old orphan who is forced to work in a sleazy bar run by a notorious pimp know as The Engineer. There she meets and falls in love with an American GI called Chris, but they are torn apart by the fall of Saigon. For three years, Kim goes on an epic journey, struggling to survive as she waits for Chris to return to her and their son, a "bui-doi" the term for a child conceived during the horrors of war, a child Chris has no idea he's fathered.

**Sets, Characters and Costumes**

Before describing the sets and characters I should warn you that this is a fast moving show where the lavish and evocative sets merge seamlessly one to another leaving little time to describe what's coming next, so at the risk of information overload, I'm going to give you a resume of each scene now.

As the audience enters the auditorium the stage is obscured by a gauze curtain in the form of a montage. The barely discernable images are of half formed words and hazy rough-timber framed buildings with a background of sketchy horizontal lines similar to bamboo fencing, all in muted shades of browns and black, the whole giving the impression of disorder and uncertainty. The same striated bamboo style panels form the backdrop and surround the stage.

The action begins during the last turbulent days of the Vietnam War. It is April 1975 and the city of Saigon is being infiltrated by Viet Cong insurgents and suffering heavy bombing raids from North Vietnam. The curtain will lift to a prologue followed by a bustling street scene in Saigon's seedy red light district. There are vendors pushing laden carts, people on bicycles weaving through the crowds, khaki-clad US soldiers mingling with the Vietnamese locals, some wearing conical hats. On either side of the street are timber and bamboo open-framed buildings with wood slatted roofs full of gaping holes. Both houses have staircases leading from the street to an upper story. The buildings have balconies, on both ground and upper levels, the handrails supported by bamboo spindles. At the back of the open balcony on the right is Kim's Bedroom.

Once the street fades the action moves to backstage at Dreamland, a glitzy bar-cum-brothel where a girl comes free with the first drink.

Center stage is an open cage-like structure or room made from vertical bamboo poles, making it just possible to see inside. This structure swivels round to form either the outside of the bar, by the back entrance, or the frenetic action in its brightly lit interior. The inside of the bar is dominated by a wonky neon 'Dreamland' sign suspended over the bar's counter top. The bar area is festooned with strings of colored fairy lights and paper lanterns, whilst a red light washes over the set capturing the sleazy atmosphere of this down at heel club. On the left of the bar stands a jukebox, which when switched on, emits flashing lights, and stacked beneath the bar are several beer crates.

High stools, stand by the bar and small wicker tables and chairs to either side. The club buzzes with Khaki-clad GIs and scantily clad girls wearing little other than bras, g-strings, suspenders, stockings and high-heeled shoes - all gyrating in a highly provocative and sexual manner as they try and attract the attention of the American soldiers.

The first person we meet at Dreamland is **The Engineer** who runs the bar whilst pimping out the Vietnamese women for the GIs. He's a cunning, big-talking, thickset, going on plump, sleazeball with untidy dark hair and a small moustache. Although not devoid of a certain charm he can appear sinister, vicious and is a twisted showman who spits verbal abuse, uses threatening behavior and can resort to physical violence with the girls, in particular the new girl Kim. When we first meet him he's dressed in a shiny purple suit with a flower print shirt and flashy medallion around his neck.

**Kim,** is a timid and quiet seventeen-year-old orphan from the country, who finds herself alone and friendless in the sexually charged atmosphere of the bar. When she arrives, she's carrying a basket and dressed in a virginal white mid-calf length cheongsam over black trousers. The dress is sleeveless with a high collar, buttoning sideways across the chest and the skirt split on either side. Her pretty face is framed by waist-length dark hair, and suffused by a mix of naive innocence and fear as she surveys the scantily dressed women of the night plying their trade.

However, Kim is soon befriended by a good-natured bar girl called, **Gigi.** She is raucous, sexy and stunningly pretty with dark hair cut in a short bob with a thick fringe. She, like the others wears very little other than a black lacy bra, the skimpiest of pants, fishnet stockings, that judging by the evidence of many large holes have seen better days, and high heeled shoes.

Amongst the many GIs who frequent the bar is the saxophone playing, **John**, a tall well built man with close-cut balding hair covered by a bandana. He wears green combat trousers, a T-shirt, combat shirt with rolled up sleeves, and a webbing belt, which has a pistol holder complete with gun. His combat trousers are tucked into black military boots. The American soldiers wear identification dog tags on chains around their necks.

**Chris** is the embodiment of the archetypal good-looking American - clean shaven with a thick head of hair, strong-jawed, and while not being as tall or quite as macho as John, does have a hunky presence. He also seems to be of a more sensitive and considerate nature than his fellow more gung-ho soldiers. He and all the other American soldiers are dressed the same as John.

At Dreamland we will also meet a variety of bar girls, Marines, barmen, an officer of the South Vietnamese Army and Vietnamese customers, along with street vendors and another principle character, **Thuy**

**Thuy**, is a young Vietnamese man from the country, who has been promised to Kim by her father in an arranged marriage. He first appears looking wild and dirty, his dark hair unkempt. He wears baggy black trousers, an open shirt over a vest and wooden clogs. Later he will appear in the smart Military uniform of the Commissar with a neat haircut.

Other scenes include the visa office at the US embassy - this is situated on the upstairs balcony area of the building on the left. This is furnished with a desk where uniformed embassy officials process the applications from long queues of local people desperate to get out of Saigon. On the ground outside is a flaming brazier emitting clouds of smoke.

For a wedding ceremony, the bar girls, now respectably dressed in colourful cheongsams, decorated the bar with garlands of flowers and set a low offering table with a small statue of Buddha, candles, incense, a perfume bottle and a framed photograph of her parents.

The action will then move toHo Chi Minh city (formerly Saigon) three years later in April 1978. Here the center of the darkened stage is dominated by a giant gold bust of Ho Chi Min flanked on either side by four long red banners, each emblazoned with a single gold star. The scene begins with revolutionary guards marching through carrying Reunification of Vietnam banners and others carrying the Stars and Stripes. During this sequence three groups of revolutionary guards will perform synchronised military-style marching dances, the first called The Morning of the Dragon. The lights will flash crimson and an enormous fire-breathing Chinese-style carnival dragon will weave its way amongst the dancers. The Guards are dressed all alike in black trousers and tops with red cummerbunds, matching headdresses and white masks. These dancers are interspersed with others in red, with black headdresses. There will be waving offlags, pennants, swirling ribbons and acrobatics from the different groups. The third group of gun-carrying men will be dressed in black with conical 'Coolie' hats made from banana leaves. The sound levels will be high, but I will do my best to keep you informed during this fast moving sequence of marching dances.

The action will then briefly switch to Atlanta USA, to a bedroom with a window looking out on skyscrapers. Here we meet **Ellen**, A wholesome, attractive American girl with a good figure and auburn hair tumbling over her shoulders.

The final scene in this Act will take place outside Kim's home in a shantytown. Two shack-like hovels face the audience with a small gap between them forming an alleyway -this is sometimes closed using a sheet of tatty canvas. The shacks are formed using bamboo and overlapping pieces of tarpaulin or cloth and topped by rusting corrugated iron. There are no windows or doors, just a small flap of cloth at ground level to go in and out. Other slum dwellers sleep on the ground in the shadows or lean against the walls, whilst Kim, still in possession of her basket, sits to one side. Here we meet **Tam**, a solemn three-year-old child. Although of mixed blood, Tam with his round face and mop of straight black hair, is Vietnamese in appearance. He is dressed in wide legged trousers with a Mandarin style jacket. Tam never speaks.

I should warn you that the show contains loud noises, smoke effects, flashing lights, gunshots, swearing and scenes of a sexually graphic and explicit nature.

Miss Saigon –– opens with the rumbling of rotor blades from an unseen helicopter. It is April 1975. In the fast moving and noisy bar scenes that follow, couples will engaged in explicit sexual acts with a great deal of pelvic trusting. Writhing bodies are everywhere - draped across tables, the stairs, pressed against walls, and in the bedrooms upstairs, but without talking over the songs it will be difficult to describe everything that is taking place.

The programme notes for act two will be given by Pam eight minutes before the start of Act two.

**Cast and Credits**

**Principles**

Miss Saigon has an enormous cast of highly talented actors, singers and dancers and musicians to name individually, so I will list the Principle characters only and in order of appearance.

The Engineer - Red Concepcion / Christian Rey Marabella

Kim - Sooha Kim / Joreen Bautista

Gigi - Aicelle Santos

John - Ryan O'Gorman

Chris = Ashley Gilmour

Thuy - Gerald Santos

Yvonne - Amanda Lindgren

Mimi - Kristine Diaz

Fifi- Eloisa Amalia Tan

Yvette - Thaq Nguyen

Dominique - Sian Yeo

Tam will be played by .... One of many who I will announce on the day.

Lighting by Bruno Poet

Sound by Mick Potter

Production Design - Matt Kinley

Costume - Andreane Neofitou

Choreography - Bob Avian

The original Miss Saigon show ran for more than ten years at London's Theatre Royal Dury Lane throughout the 1990s, with the revised anniversary production running at The Prince Edward Theatre from 2014-2016.

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