



West End Eurovision – Adelphi Theatre, London

Reviewer: Richard Maguire

As hotly anticipated as this year's *Eurovision* is *The West End Eurovision* where seven London musicals battle it out for the best performance of a song that has featured in Europe's biggest music competition. Indeed, with all the competitors' glitter and sequins *The West End Eurovision* is campier than the real thing, and has enough abs to make a boy band blush.

The premise is simple. Each musical takes on a *Eurovision* classic –or in some cases, not so classic – song to win the coveted prize, won last year by the cast of *The Phantom of the Opera*. All proceeds of the evening go to charity Make A Difference Trust, which supports those living and affected with HIV/AIDS around the world. Last year's event raised over £400,000, and while none of the performers or crew or judges receives payment, the production values remain surprisingly high and each team is fiercely committed.

Overlooking the proceedings from their box are this year's judges: *Blue Peter*'s Tim Vincent, *Love Island*'s Amber Davies, currently in musical *9 to 5*, West End legend Wayne Sleep, and getting the most raucous applause – it is that kind of audience – Bonnie Langford, also in *9 to 5*, and tipped to be Darcey Bussell's replacement in *Strictly*. Our host for the evening is Richard Gauntlet, better known for his pantomime dames, who thanks us for being at the Adelphi rather than the pantomime awards being held in Wimbledon. ' *West End Eurovision* is one charity event that Biggins won't be attending', Gauntlet quips.

In their first year, and probably their last (?), is *Only Fools and Horses* who take on *Dancing Lasha Tumbai*, which came second for Ukraine in 2007. Keeping a certain Peckham trademark to their routine, they ultimately come last in the competition but it's an honourable debut. Another new show is *Follies*, which is currently on at the National (again) and four of its stars, including Janie Dee and Joanna Riding, sing a stripped back version of France's winning entry in 1977, *L'oiseau et L'enfant*. Their slick performance earns them second place.

Everybody's Talking About Jamie take their chances with *Toy*, last year's winning entry for Israel, but even the impressive tumbles and the splits of *Jamie's* lead, Layton Williams, can't quite push the cast into first place. Perhaps the most energetic choreography comes from *Aladdin* who perform Finland's *Monsters*, also from last year's Eurovision, although the cast of *Wicked* give them a run for their money with their lively rendition, complete with tambourines, of *Wild Dances*, which won for Ukraine in 2004. *Mamma Mia* inexplicably choose Iceland's 19th-placed song of 2010, but with their deliberate pratfalls and costume malfunctions, their performance of *Je Ne Sais Quoi* is a hoot.

Before the results are announced we are introduced to our special guests of the evening. First, Michael Rice sings *Bigger Than Us*, the UK's entry for this year's *Eurovision*. The winner of last year's *All Together Now* can certainly sing but Rice needs just a bit more stage presence if he is to make an impression in Tel Aviv in a few weeks time. Also appearing tonight, and in *Eurovision 2019*, is Israel's own Dana International, who won in 1998 with *Diva*, and the diva is still going. Of course, such divas don't need to sing live, a decision that doesn't quite please the audience. Where's Bucks Fizz when you need them?

But perhaps it is the memory of Bucks Fizz's big reveal in *Making Your Mind Up* that helps *The Phantom of the Opera* retain their title of champions. Not only do the male singers rip off the women's outfits to reveal multi-coloured sequined dresses, but also their rendition of Italy's *Grande Amore* (2015) features some dramatic and snappy choreography that has the audience up on their feet. It's a knockout performance, and they are worth winners.

At just under three hours long, *West End Eurovision* is still a good deal shorter than the real deal but the energy and the dedication of all involved including, lest we forget, musical director Matheson Bayley and his band, ensure that the time flies by. If *Phantom* isn't to take the crown again in 2020, the other West End musicals need to start sewing on their sequins very soon!

Reviewed on 28 April 2019 | Image: PBG Studios

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Viva Las Divas!