

Fort Salem Theatre, Salem, NY

## **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street**,

book by Hugh Wheeler. Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.

Directed by James Alexander. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

***“Nothing’s gonna harm you, Not while I’m around.”***

Three love stories and sexual misconduct dominate the Stephen Sondheim musical, “Sweeney Todd. . .” now on stage at Fort Salem Theatre in upstate New York. The story of a man, betrayed by his local government in London and transported to Australia, who returns home after nearly twenty years to find no trace of his former life, his wife reported as dead, his daughter stolen by his enemy he takes a much-deserved revenge on society. Benjamin Barker, now known as Sweeney Todd, loves his departed Lucy with passion. His young friend Anthony, a sailor who saved Todd’s life at sea, falls in love with a young woman held prisoner by her patron. The shopkeeper, Mrs. Lovett - a baker of meat pies, whose shop is below Todd’s old residence and workplace, is in love with the Benjamin Barker who was and now with the Sweeney Todd who is. These three relationships form the crux of the plot. They are all volatile.



Meghan DiMeglio; Photo: Mike Hatzel

Judge Turpin, very well played by Travis Barone, creator of Barker’s downfall, has loved the wife and now wants to marry the daughter he has raised as his ward. She is a young, blonde beauty played by Jenna Wilkinson who sings like the bird she serenades. His associate, Beadle Bamford is played ideally by Will Heatley though his ideal of the character is a tiny bit soft. Todd’s professional rival, the Italian barber Pirelli is acted and sung by Rory Alexa whose performance highlights the smarminess of the man to perfection. His very young assistant, Tobias, is performed by the equally young Charlie Palmer, who brought honest innocence to the role for the first time in my long experience of this show. The sailor, Anthony, is enacted by Keith DuBois whose voice was often hard to hear, probably due to a faulty microphone. The ensemble also had sound problems, but they did their bits as well as possible. Meghan DiMeglio was the



Molly Waters, James Alexander; Photo: Mike Hatzel

beggar woman.

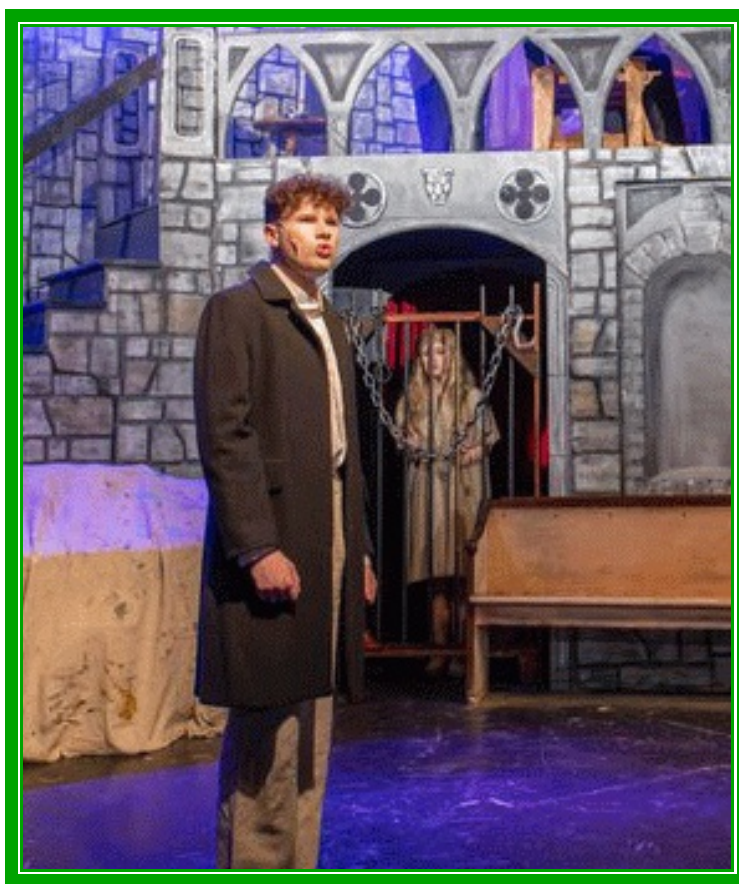
The two leads gave their “all” to their roles. Molly Waters’ Mrs. Lovett was a perfect example of a woman whose judgement is marred by passion. Her eagerness to assist Todd and have him to hold was chilling but her lack of enunciation made her divine lyrics by Sondheim difficult to understand at times. Alexander, who also directed the show, chose to play the rage/revenge aspects of Todd with an unrelenting insensitivity that altered my previous vision of the character. He sang with strength, clarity and beauty but he has no other emotions to play which managed to cripple his character. I could not either take his side or point of view.

Alexander has set his production in a decrepit British church with its three levels representing the many places in London where the action takes place. The set design by Charles J.I. Krawczyk was an eyeful and it worked very well. Most of Rory Alexa’s costumes were appropriate and looked good. Some of the lighting design was confusing and the sound was not well handled.

“Sweeney Todd” is a difficult show and not a joyous one, more an opera than a musical. This edition is well worth a visit but keep your passport handy; you may want to flee the horrors of rage.

+ 04/28/2024 +

**Sweeney...** plays at the Fort Salem Theatre through May 4. For information and ticket go to [fortsaalem.com](http://fortsaalem.com).



Keith DuBois, Jenna Wilkinson; Photo: Mike Hatzel

