

Seussical cast and crew prove ‘anything’s possible’

What an adventure it was last week in the land of Dr Seuss!

Seussical was a resounding success, and our cast, crew and orchestra proved that “anything’s possible”. The experience of being in a professional theatre with an exceptional set, extraordinary lighting features, creative props and whimsical sound effects was an experience never to forget.

Congratulations to the whole cast for your dedication, commitment, and creativity throughout the two terms of Friday afternoon rehearsals, holiday rehearsals and each Saturday in Term 1. A huge thank you to the Performing Arts staff for their tireless commitment to the show. We are very thankful for having such a dedicated team of teachers who go above and beyond to create such wonderful opportunities for the girls.

Meriden’s composer and composition teacher and the Principal Artistic Associate of Sydney Chamber Opera, Dr Huw Belling, attended *Seussical* on Friday evening. His review of the show sums up the experience beautifully!

Ms Jodie Spooner-Ryan

Dean of Music (P-12)

Photos from the performances of Seussical are available below Dr Belling’s review

Seussical: a review by Dr Huw Belling

As JoJo (Lucy Elton) dons his hat—at the encouragement of the Cat in the Hat (Vienna Korkis)—the curtain lifts to reveal a full-cast tableau: frozen in elegant stillness atop a giant version of JoJo’s desk (set design by Justin Fitzgerald, lit evocatively by Victor Mrowka). Elton’s wide-eyed expression becomes a window into a world of wonder and acceptance. It’s clear from this powerful directorial choice by Annemaree McLeod that we are spending the evening inside JoJo’s imagination.

And what a space it is. This is no bleak dreamscape à la Artaud or Beckett—it leans instead toward the whimsy and wonder of Milne, Lear, Carroll, and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Still, there’s a trace of Brechtian allegory here—albeit unfolding at a dizzying pace, with little regard for narrative logic. Imagination, not cynicism, is the chief prerogative. A sorry parade of adult proxies appears onstage to challenge JoJo’s goodness.

From among the Whos (Sic: a rollicking civilisation built on a speck of dust), or at least costumed in a vivid yellow palette (design by Caroline Morabito and Alyssa Van Ede), emerge JoJo’s guardians (Corrine Xu and Dahlia Toovey). They despair at JoJo’s non-conformity, and their prescription—bath and bed—does little to deter JoJo’s conscription into the cadets (one of whom, Mietta Nankervis, is accused of having an opinion despite her shiftless expression: comedy gold). This military troupe is led with verve by General Genghis Khan Schmitz (Veronica Xie). Xu and Toovey’s costumes, with their 1950s inflections (Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis for the latter?), suit their Mr and Mrs Mayor titles perfectly—voice and movement aligned to affect. (Fantastic and dizzying choreography throughout by Aaron Robuck).

Elton holds her own, never tempted to react cynically to the events her penmanship precipitates—or is it the mischievous Cat in the Hat (Korkis), with her wry smile and stylish songs, who is the puppeteer? Elton’s performance is powerfully counter-adolescent (no eye-rolling here), and her musical delivery is pitch-perfect, including judicious colourations in the repeated phrases of the underwater number *It’s Possible*.

Flaherty's musical style may be naïve, but it's confident—favouring stylistic, standalone numbers over larger-scale development (though reprises do abound). In this way, *Seussical* embraces a vaudeville or jukebox musical aesthetic, recalling early 20th-century “numbers” pieces. The pit band (always the unsung heroes) played with exquisite vigour and intonation, easing us into the imaginative world under the assured direction of Jodie Spooner-Ryan's baton (nearly stolen by the Cat himself at interval). The overall sound mix (Sound design by Loud and Clear Audio) was well-balanced and, frankly, on par with some of Opera Australia's outdoor efforts—rhythm and pitch any seasoned adult performer would envy. The score frequently leans on a motivic figure of hard-to-sing fifths, which the cast delivered in full harmony and with deft vocal mixing on breaks. It's hard to pigeonhole the show's wide range of musical styles, so I'll settle for a general ‘peppy’.

JoJo, for all the obstacles he faces, has some powerful allies in his dream-world. Horton the Elephant (Indiana Cheung) is a gentle soul who loses (and must then find) a dust speck that contains the entire Whos civilization—whoops—and ends up sitting on an egg the chief bird and all round flibbertigibbet Mayzie LaBird (Maddy Wood). Wood belts out jazzy numbers with flair, providing a compelling contrast to the self-improving Gertrude McFuzz (Celeste Ryan). Note to composers: avoid giving characters rhotic names like “Gertrude” if you plan have them sung often! Ryan's performance—in her blueish dress—is a dead ringer for early Judy Garland, and I'd be stunned if this wasn't, at least subconsciously, a directorial nod from the seasoned McLeod. Ryan's vocal control, tonal precision, and impeccable accent work make her Gertrude as endearing as Wood's Mayzie is deliciously frustrating.

The trio of additional birds—Anastasia Ibrahim, Josephine Graham, and Vanessa Wang—delivered a Sapphires-worthy combination of tone and savoir-faire. Meanwhile, the quasi-villainous jungle brothers (hilariously bedecked in '70s-brown to match their music) provided cheeky contrast: Arshia Nanda, Zoe Leon, Mia Pertsinidis, Abigail Sidhom, Nishkala Shivashankaran and Sophie Yang. They're sometimes led—or at least parried—by Charrlette Zin-Daniels as the Sour and Young Kangaroos, whose soulful belt channelled vintage R&B excellence.

Yet another troupe of impressively cast circus performers dazzled in the second act with acrobatics, contortions, and splits—all while singing, naturally. (No free passes at this school.) Add to this the Grinch (perhaps Seuss's most famous character, here played by Mikhayla Lobo), and Thing 1 and Thing 2 (Alexandra McLean and Chloe Tam). In a lesser production, these characters might feel supernumerary—operating fans out of buckets, for example—but their comic instincts and stage presence more than justified Flaherty and Ahrens's excess.

Some cast members joked with me that I still wouldn't know what *Seussical* was about by the end. Fair! With such a sprawling character list, the undertaking could easily become unwieldy—and that's true enough of Ahrens's indulgent, narratively chaotic book. But not here. Not this time. The cast navigated those challenges with panache, delivering an utterly engaging and bedazzling show, grounded in its own bonkers logic. It strikes me that in theatre, execution should always outweigh premise. Tonight, it did.

*Oh the sounds I can hear
Oh the sights I can see
All the rhyming, I fear
Isn't normally to my taste.*

Dr Huw Belling
Composition Teacher

Meriden's production of *Seussical*



MERIDEN
AN ANGLICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS



MERIDEN
AN ANGLICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

