



## Raleigh

# BWW Reviews: NC Theatre Scores Big with LES MISERABLES

by

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North Carolina Theatre is taking on an iconic work of musical theater with their current staging of *LES MISERABLES*. Such a piece is quite a feat to put on, and to do it well is a great undertaking, but NC Theatre manages to accomplish something spectacular by combining the best talent of the Triangle with amazing New York actors. The result is a production which does justice to the cultural monolith which is *Les Mis*. It's a perfect production for die-hard fans and first-timers

alike.

*LES MISERABLES* is the well-known story of Jean Valjean, a man over-punished for his crimes, Javert, Valjean's relentless pursuer, and a group of young students trying to make their voices heard in 19th Century France. There's love, heartbreak, death, tears, revenge, and ultimately, hope. Though the story itself is rather complex, audience members will be able to follow every plot and subplot, thanks to clear direction and graceful storytelling from director Dave Clemmons and the cast.

It would be all too easy to spend pages extolling the awe-inducing qualities of each cast member. The entire ensemble is truly a talented, professional bunch. With veterans Craig Schulman, Chuck Wagner, and Lauren Kennedy as Valjean, Javert, and Fantine, respectively, the cast is led with skill and heart. Young actors Bruce Landry and Julie Benko excel as Marius and Cosette. Out of the students leading the rebellion, it is Charlie Brady's Enjolras who makes the biggest impact. With incredibly strong vocals and passion to spare, Brady is unforgettable. Additionally, Alison Cimmet is sheer perfection as Mme. Thénardier, as she creates a character whose comedic moments don't diminish her true villainous identity.

NC Theatre truly managed to find the best of local talent, including Riley Campbell (real-life daughter of Kennedy, this production's Fantine) making a strong professional debut as young Cosette. Reed Shannon's Gavroche is downright phenomenal, and Shannon matches the talent caliber of his grown-up cast-mates. Lastly, still a high school senior, English Bernhardt is as good an Eponine as you're likely to find anywhere. With her vocal talent, poise, and charm, you're sure to see her on a New York stage very soon.

The singers are accompanied by a great orchestra, led by Edward G. Robinson. All of the elements come together to create an incredibly high-quality production. Despite a couple of missed lighting cues and a few lines not getting picked up by microphones, the show is almost seamless. You certainly won't want to miss this great production of such an epic musical theater masterpiece.

*LES MISERABLES* is playing in the Raleigh Memorial Auditorium at the Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Raleigh. The production runs through February 23. For tickets and more information, visit [www.nctheatre.com](http://www.nctheatre.com).

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