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“Les Misérables” C’est Manifique!

Posted by [Robert W. McDowell+](#) • February 12th, 2014 • [Printer-friendly](#)



Chuck Wagner (left) and Craig Schulman reprise their Broadway roles as Inspector Javert and Jean Valjean (photo by Curtis Brown Photography)

Broadway Series South and the **North Carolina Theatre**'s homegrown co-production of *Les Misérables* *c'est manifique!* (Please forgive my crossword-puzzle French.) **Craig Schulman, Chuck Wagner, and Raleigh native Lauren Kennedy** all brilliantly reprise their Broadway roles as parole breaker-turned businessman and village mayor Jean Valjean, his implacable nemesis Inspector Javert, and Valjean's fired former employee-turned-prostitute Fantine with a verve and vibrancy that compares favorably with the best of the various touring companies of *Les Misérables* that have worked their theatrical magic on the **Raleigh Memorial Auditorium** stage.

Short and stocky Craig Schulman, who has played Jean Valjean more than 2,000 times for four theater companies in three different countries, shows why this role has become his bread and butter. He gives a rousing performance as the reformed petty thief who just cannot shake the stigma of a youthful indiscretion (he stole a loaf of bread to feed his starving nephew!). His ringing rendition of “Bring Him Home” is worth the price of admission all by itself, and his invigorating interpretations of the other songs in the Jean Valjean songbook truly pluck the audience's heartstrings.

Tall and stout as a pillar of (self-)righteousness, Chuck Wagner radiates menace and, dare we say, madness as the relentless Inspector Javert. Wagner is truly imposing as Valjean's insufferable personal persecutor, and he makes Javert's maniacal obsession with recapturing parole jumper Jean Valjean — at all costs — palpable.





Lauren Kennedy will play Fantine and her daughter, Riley Campbell, with play Fantine’s daughter, Young Cosette (photo by Curtis Scott Brown)

Hometown girl-turned-Broadway star Lauren Kennedy’s poignant performance of “I Dreamed a Dream” will also pluck a heartstring or two. Her passionate portrayal of poor Fantine — impregnated and abandoned by her child’s fickle father, unjustly fired from her job in Valjean’s factory, and forced into prostitution to support herself and her daughter Cosette — is heartrending.

Kennedy’s real-life daughter, **North Carolina Theatre** Conservatory student **Riley Campbell**, who plays Fantine’s daughter Young Cosette, makes an impressive theatrical debut. Her version of “Castle on a Cloud” is haunting; and **Dirk Lumbard** and **Alison Cimmet** provide considerable comic relief as the larcenous innkeepers Monsieur and Madame Thénardier, who treat Young Cosette as their slave — a much-abused and degraded Cinderella, but without a Fairy Godmother fluttering in the wings to swoop to her rescue.

Also making highly favorable impressions are **Julie Benko** as Fantine’s grown-up illegitimate daughter Cosette; **Bruce Landry** as her beloved the fiery student revolutionary Marius Pontmercy; **Charlie Brady** as Marius’ friend and fellow revolutionary; and **Joseph Torello** as the kindly Bishop of Digne. But it is two other **North Carolina Theatre** Conservatory students — **English Bernhardt**, who plays the Thénardiens’ daughter Éponine, and **Reed Shannon**, who portrays the impudent street urchin Gavroche — who create the most unforgettable characters. Moreover, Bernhardt demonstrates star quality, especially in her lovelorn character’s plaintive lament, “On My Own.”

Smart and snappy musical staging by BSS and NCT guest director **Dave Clemmons** and associate director/choreographer **Melanie Tojio Locklear** also elevate this local production; but it is dynamic accompaniment by musical director/conductor **Edward G. Robinson** and the show’s orchestra that puts wind beneath the performers’ wings.

Although this production eschews the turntable set, set designer **Bruce Brockman’s** soaring scenery and costume designer **Deborah Roberts’** eye-catching early 19th century outfits — both originally designed for the **Music Theatre of Wichita** — combine with the hazy illumination devised by lighting designer **John Bartenstein** to transport the 21st century **Raleigh Memorial Auditorium** audience back to early 19th century France of novelist **Victor Hugo**, circa 1815 to 1832, when the growing disparity between rich and poor fanned the fires of a second French Revolution. Don’t miss this magnificent locally produced presentation of ***Les Misérables!***

SECOND OPINION: Feb. 12th Raleigh, NC News & Observer review by **Roy C. Dicks:**

<http://www.newsobserver.com/2014/02/12/3616064/les-miserables-an-earnest-talent.html>; Feb. 12th Raleigh, NC North Raleigh News article by Sarah Barr: <http://www.northraleighnews.com/2014/02/12/3615670/students-shine-in-nc-theatres.html>; Feb. 5th Durham, NC Indy Week mini-preview by Byron Woods: <http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/les-misrables/Event?oid=3774989>; Feb. 2nd Raleigh, NC Midtown Raleigh News preview by "Midtown Muse" Lori D.R. Wiggins: <http://www.midtownraleighnews.com/2014/02/01/3580803/raleigh-thespian-to-make-broadway.html>; Feb. 2nd Raleigh, NC WRAL.COM interview with Lauren Kennedy, conducted by Sarah Hall for "GoAskMom": <http://www.wral.com/broadway-star-lauren-kennedy-to-share-raleigh-stage-with-daughter/13349166/>; and Jan. 31st Raleigh, NC BroadwayWorld.com Raleigh preview by the BWW News Desk: <http://www.broadwayworld.com/raleigh/article/North-Carolina-Theatre-to-Open-LES-MISERABLES-Feb-11-20140131>. (Note: To read Triangle Arts and Entertainment's online version of the Feb. 11th Triangle Review preview by Robert W. McDowell, click <http://triangleartsandentertainment.org/2014/02/les-miserables-returns-to-raleigh-on-feb-11-23-with-lauren-kennedy-playing-her-role-as-fantine/>.)

Broadway Series South and the **North Carolina Theatre** present **LES MISÉRABLES**, starring **Lauren Kennedy as Fantine and her daughter, Riley Campbell, as Young Cosette** at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 12-14, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Feb. 15 and 16, 7:30 p.m. Feb. 18-21, and 2 and 7:30 p.m. Feb. 22 and 23 in **Raleigh Memorial Auditorium** in the Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts, 2 E. South St., Raleigh, North Carolina 27601.

TICKETS: \$52.65-\$120.40 (including fees).

BOX OFFICE:

Duke Energy Center Box Office (information only): 919-996-8700 and info@dukeenergycenterraleigh.com.

NCT Box Office: 919-831-6941, ext.6944.

Ticketmaster: 800-745-3000 or <http://www.ticketmaster.com/venueartist/115203/803968>.

GROUP RATES (10+ tickets):

Broadway Series South: 919-996-8707, group@raleighconvention.com, or <http://www.dukeenergycenterraleigh.com/broadway-series-south/group-sales>.

North Carolina Theatre: 919-831-6941, ext. 5204, or <http://www.nctheatre.com/tickets/group-sales>.

SHOW: <http://www.dukeenergycenterraleigh.com/event/lesmiserables-4014> and <http://nctheatre.com/shows/les-miserables>.

PRESENTERS:

Broadway Series South: <http://www.dukeenergycenterraleigh.com/broadway-series-south> and <https://www.facebook.com/broadwayseriesouthraleigh>.

North Carolina Theatre: <http://www.nctheatre.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/pages/North-Carolina-Theatre/24276860186>.

2014 BSS SEASON: <http://www.dukeenergycenterraleigh.com/broadway-series-south>.

2014 NCT SEASON: <http://nctheatre.com/2014-shows>.

NCT BLOG: <http://www.nctheatre.com/stage-notes>.

VENUE: <http://www.dukeenergycenterraleigh.com/venue/memorial-auditorium>.

DIRECTIONS: <http://www.dukeenergycenterraleigh.com/directions>. **PARKING:** <http://www.dukeenergycenterraleigh.com/parking>.

NOTE: **Arts Access, Inc. of Raleigh** will audio describe the 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 15th, performance.

OTHER LINKS:

Les Misérables (1862 historical novel): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Mis%C3%A9rables (Wikipedia).

The Novel (e-text): http://openlibrary.org/works/OL1063591W/Les_Miserables (Open Library at the Internet Archive).

Victor Hugo (French novelist, 1802-85) <http://www.gavroche.org/vhugo/> (Victor Hugo Central, compiled by John Newmark), <http://www.victorhugo.gg/> (the States of Guernsey's Official Victor Hugo website), and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Hugo (Wikipedia).

The France of Victor Hugo: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/hist255/> (Robert Schwartz of Mt. Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA).

Les Misérables (1980 Paris, 1985 West End, and 1987 Broadway musical) <http://www.lesmis.com/> (official website), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Mis%C3%A9rables_%28musical%29 (Wikipedia), and <http://www.ibdb.com/show.php?ID=5340> (Internet Broadway Database).

Study Guide: <http://www.bard.org/education/studyguides/lesmiserables/miserables.html> (Utah Shakespeare Festival).

Claude-Michel Schönberg (music): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude-Michel_Sch%C3%B6nberg (Wikipedia).

Herbert Kretzmer (English lyrics): <http://www.herbertkretzmer.com/> (official website) and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Kretzmer (Wikipedia).

Trevor Nunn (English book): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trevor_Nunn (Wikipedia).

John Caird (English book): <http://www.johncaird.com/> (official website) and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Caird_%28director%29 (Wikipedia).

Les Misérables (2012 film) <http://www.lesmiserablesfilm.com/> (official website), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1707386/> (Internet Movie Database), and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Mis%C3%A9rables_%282012_film%29 (Wikipedia).

Dave Clemmons (BBS and NCT guest director): <http://www.texasmusicaltheaterworkshop.com/portfolio/dave-clemmons/> (Texas Musical Theater Workshop bio) and <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Dave-Clemmons-Casting-Masterclasses/55283883094> (Facebook page).

Craig Schulman (actor): <http://www.craigschulman.com/> (official website).

Chuck Wagner (actor): <http://chuckwagner.com/> (official website) and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuck_Wagner (Wikipedia).

Lauren Kennedy (actress): <http://www.laurenkennedy.com/> (official website), <https://www.facebook.com/slaurenkennedy> (Facebook page), and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lauren_Kennedy (Wikipedia).

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Robert W. McDowell has written articles for The News & Observer, The Raleigh Times, Spectator Magazine, CVNC, and **Triangle Arts and Entertainment**, all based in Raleigh. He edits and publishes two FREE weekly e-mail newsletters. **Triangle Review** provides comprehensive, in-depth coverage of local performing-arts events. (Start your FREE subscription by e-mailing robertm748@aol.com and typing **SUBSCRIBE TR** in the Subject: line.) McDowell also maintains a FREE list of movie sneak previews. (To subscribe, e-mail robertm748@aol.com and type **SUBSCRIBE FFL FREE** in the Subject: line.)

Summary

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