



Caterham School: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* - a mediaeval tale most elegantly told

As an NSTA Representative, I had the great pleasure of attending the Caterham School production of the musical *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* on Saturday 6th December 2025. As soon as I entered the imposing Humphreys Theatre and saw a set rich in potential, a beautifully-presented orchestra, and ranks of monks filling every onstage space, I knew we were about to witness a tremendous portrayal of this magical show, from the talented hands of Director of Drama, Miss Guttner, and Musical Director, Mrs Richards.

And what a wonderful show to present. Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz's musical *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* has evolved, first from Victor Hugo's novel of 1831, then from the Walt Disney movie of 1996, into this musical of 1999, written first in German before being adapted into English. The story tells of Parisian Archdeacon Frollo, a character twisted by piety and a self-imposed ban on carnality, who is seeking to manage a relationship with his nephew Quasimodo, the eponymous hunchback of the title. Quasimodo is banished to the darker parts of the cathedral, with little to do but ring bells and chat with gargoyles. Determined to explore the wider world and protected by the city's Feast of Fools masquerade, Quasimodo ventures out and encounters Esmeralda, a young Romani woman targeted by Captain Phoebus, the morally conflicted Captain of the City Guard, who struggles to reconcile his sense of duty with his growing love for her. Their stories all join together as the tale unfolds in a feast of music and colour.

The company is clearly rich in talent and did a wonderful job presenting this story. In the principal cast, George (Archdeacon Frollo) acted as the show's fulcrum, holding the whole performance together, remaining onstage virtually throughout. She offered authority and command, and her fine acting performance might make it easy to overlook her equally fine vocal performance - both were immensely impressive. Her performance of "Hellfire" might well have been the highlight of the entire show - it was sensational.

There were certainly some rich voices on display, particularly from Charlie (Quasimodo) whose beautiful top notes rang out as clear and as clean as the bells in Notre-Dame's bell towers. A delightful vocal performance was complimented by a sharp characterisation of this tragic character; with Quasimodo's abilities overshadowed by his perceived disability. Charlie really got inside this character and sustained all parts of it well, really giving us the pathos at the heart of this story. What an accomplished actor he is.

Emily brought Esmeralda to life with skill, capturing fully her wild and feisty personality while delivering stunning vocal performances in "Someday" and "Top of the World".



The performances from the supporting cast were no less impressive. Of particular note was Logan as Captain Phoebus, who showed real panache and swagger as the dashing soldier-turned-Romeo. Logan carried it all off with abundant flair, singing elegantly and parading about with style.

The wider ensemble cast provided excellent support, working cohesively to advance the narrative through confident choreography and well-blended choral work. This strength was particularly evident in the gargoyles, who were perfectly costumed and vividly realised, with posing and gurning that met the physical demands of their roles wonderfully. Their vocal contributions were rich and expressive, proving that Marusia, Rory, Aggie, William, Ann and Lia are anything but monstrous.

It was wonderful to see so many pupils (and some teachers!) involved in the production. The clever inclusion of a monastic choir, led by Director of Music Mr Assen, enriched the overall vocals of the show. The orchestra provided high quality instrumental accompaniment. The show was beautifully costumed too, which was quite some feat given the size of the cast. The set design was sharply lit and incredibly effective, evoking the grandeur of Notre Dame itself, with candles everywhere adding wonderfully to the atmosphere.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame presents us with the Feast of Fools but there were certainly no fools in this production, onstage or off. Instead, Caterham's *Hunchback of Notre Dame* was a feast of musical theatre, beautifully sung, powerfully enacted, and a medieval tale most elegantly told. Taking on such a mature and emotionally complex musical is an ambitious feat for any school, but this cast and creative team rose to the challenge with professionalism and passion.

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