



## **Clevedon School: Made in Dagenham - An Empowering and Joyful Performance!**

As an NSTA representative, I had the distinct pleasure of seeing the Clevedon School production of *Made in Dagenham*, as performed on Wednesday 10th December 2025. Directed by Deborah Morgan and Oliver Davis, with Musical Direction by Polly Cleave and Vocal Direction by Katy Read, this production was a triumph of empowerment, joy and talent.

*Made in Dagenham* follows the real-life 1968 walkout by the Ford sewing machinists, unfolding in a tightly knit, working-class community brimming with social unrest. At its centre is Rita O'Grady, who unexpectedly becomes the face of a fight for fairness when she and her colleagues learn they are being paid far less than the men doing comparable work. The introduction to the O'Grady family in "Busy Woman" burst with energy, immediately grounding the audience in Dagenham through sharp accent work, crisp choreography, and confident staging.

The school took full advantage of the wealth of talent involved, allowing them to double cast the production. The students in the lead roles shone in this show, and I'm certain the alternate cast delivered performances just as strong. At this performance, Amy delivered a captivating performance as Rita. Her delivery of "We Nearly Had It All" and "Stand Up" were both beautifully sung and genuinely moving. Giovanni, as Eddie, matched her with vibrant energy, emotion, and warmth, and a remarkably authentic East London accent. His solo in "The Letter" was a standout performance, with impressive vocals that conveyed Eddie's despair, supported beautifully by Rita's reactions. Both performers handled their physicality and mannerisms with skill, embodying characters older than themselves with striking maturity and ease, and powerfully conveying their frustrations and sorrow. Together Giovanni and Amy delivered a tender rendition of "I'm Sorry I Love You" in which their vocals, chemistry, and movement - thought through to the most intricate detail - made this duet a standout moment.

The ensemble of machinists was strongly characterised and provided comedic moments to counter the powerful scenes between Eddie and Rita. Beryl was played with a strong sense of playfulness and innuendo by Charlotte, excelling particularly during her delivery in "This Is What We Want". Lizzie, as the confident and outspoken Cass, performed with both vocal assurance and spirit as she rallied the group. Xanthe, as the ditzy Clare, provided lightness and humour, both during her moment in the spotlight for the comical "Wossname", and in the smaller details of her physical delivery in the background of each scene. Emily's portrayal of Sandra was sweet and engaging, capturing the character's sense of glamour with a charismatic performance.

In the wider supporting cast, several other performances cannot go unmentioned. Becky exuded delicacy, elegance and warm approachability as Lisa Hopkins, creating a fully believable ally for Rita. Evie's portrayal of Barbara was spot on, but the standout moment came with "In an Ideal World", where she paired warm, confident vocals with a grounded sincerity that made Barbara's hopes feel profoundly real. It was a mature, moving performance that lingered well after the final note. Max was suitably larger than life and pompous as the Prime Minister Harold Wilson, comically out of touch with real working people.



This was carefully conveyed through his confident swagger and exaggeration in every movement, and a delight every time he was onstage. Zee's performance as Connie was delicate yet deeply compelling, and her rendition of "Connie's Song" was stunning, with rich vocals that conveyed Connie's frustration with genuine flair. Sam burst onto the stage in the second act as Tooley, leading "This Is America" with authentic bravado, supported by backing singers draped in American flags and bouncing cheerleaders (who executed an impressive basket toss amongst other delights within their routine!). This number had all the bolster, flair and arrogance required, it was a real delight led by an impressive performer. Sam's delivery of Tooley's nastier moments were delivered with an oily, sleazy bravado, making him a believable villain of the piece.

Whilst individual actors shone, the ensemble's energy was an unstoppable source of joy, bursting with 1960s flavour in "This Is What We Want", "Pay Day" and "Everybody Out". The ensemble's energy in "Made in Dagenham" was equally impressive, enhanced by an explosive pyrotechnic effect that started the show with a real bang. But the quieter ensemble numbers were no less impactful, and "Storm Clouds" stood out as a powerful example of conveying emotion with simple but effective choreography, unified vocals, and atmospheric blue lighting - this song crescendoed beautifully into the ensemble chorus.

One of the most remarkable elements of this production was the ten-piece pit band, made up entirely of Clevedon pupils. Joie, Esme, Toby, Louisa, Hector, Jeremy, Seb, Rian, Jamie and Sam deserve huge praise for their musicianship and professionalism. Listening to them, you would never have guessed these performers were pupils; the show leapt to life from the very first notes of the overture. Beyond their spirited performances in the musical numbers, the band provided subtle and atmospheric underscoring throughout, adding depth and colour to key scenes, for instance by providing a gentle snare and brass jazz instrumental to set the restaurant scene beautifully before the scenery transition had even finished.

As the show powered toward its conclusion, the choice to scatter cast members on benches across the thrust stage cleverly drew the audience into the TUC assembly, blurring the line between observer and participant as Rita began her speech leading into "Stand Up". The opening of this song was beautifully delivered with real emotion by Amy, and as the song swelled into a full ensemble chorus, the audience was swept up in its triumphant energy.

With bold direction, committed performances, and truly outstanding musicianship, Clevedon School delivered a show brimming with heart, humour and purpose. It was a privilege to witness such talented young people bring this important story to life, and the entire company should feel immensely proud of what they achieved onstage.

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