**Les Misérables**

**by Boublil and Schönberg**

**a musical based on the novel by Victor Hugo**

**Programme notes for Audio Described Performance**

**Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, 10th January 2019, 7.30pm**

Welcome to the introductory notes for **Les Misérables** with music by Claude-Michel Schönberg and English text by Herbert Kretzmer based on the original French text by Alain Boublil and Jean-Marc Natel. It is presented by Cameron Mackintosh. This production is directed Laurence Connor and James Powell, with Set and Image Design by Matt Kinley, inspired by the paintings of Victor Hugo. Costume Design by Andreane Neofitou and Christine Rowland. Lighting is by Paule Constable and Sound is by Mick Potter. The Musical Director on this tour is Ben Atkinson.

This audio-described performance lasts for approximately three hours, including one fifteen minute interval.

**ABOUT THE SHOW**

Cameron Mackintosh’s acclaimed production of **Les Misérables** kicks off its UK & Ireland tour in Dublin.

With glorious new staging and dazzlingly reimagined scenery inspired by the paintings of Victor Hugo, this breath-taking new production was conceived in 2009 to celebrate the 25th Anniversary and broke box office records throughout the UK, followed by productions in North America, France, Canada, Australia, Korea, Japan, Spain, Manila, Singapore, Brazil and Dubai.

Based on Victor Hugo’s classic novel, Boublil and Schönberg’s magnificent score of **Les Misérables** includes the songs, “I Dreamed a Dream”, “On My Own”, “Stars”, “Bring Him Home”, “Do You Hear the People Sing?”, “One Day More”, “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables”, “Master Of The House” and many more.

**ABOUT THE SET**

The stage is vast and empty. The floor is scored with thin tracks which are used to glide huge buildings into place noiselessly. The back wall of the stage is a massive screen onto which are projected a series of dark and evocative watercolour paintings based on Victor Hugo’s own drawings, to set each scene. Hidden in the wings to the left and right of the stage, towards the front, are tall three-storey stone and timber buildings. These are drawn on part of the way to create a street scene or crossing the entire stage to create a warren of tenement flats before us.

These buildings are uneven, with mismatched pieces of wood or wrought-iron balconies outside of long windows. On the ground floor there are stone archways that provide a handy means of escape often. There are two great piles of broken wooden beams, wagon wheels and barrels on the extreme right and left of the stage, outside the proscenium arch.

On the centre of the stage an array of wooden staircases and broken furniture are brought on to create different stages for the action. Each time, they are broken apart, turned about and brought back into a new configuration to transport us to another scene, along with the accompanying projection. They are described below in the order in which they appear.

As the audience arrives, there is a screen lowered at the front with a dark, cloudy sky painted on it, in blue, greys, and black, as though storm clouds were approaching. Victor Hugo’s signature appears in the lower right hand corner.

Next we are on-board a ship, with animated oil painting waves crashing on the screen behind, as well as ropes lashing against tall masts. Wooden steps form the prow of a boat, with its captain standing on high, silhouetted against the dark sky. Men kneel in twos pulling at massive oars, leaving a narrow walkway between those on the left and the right.

Next, the stage is cleared, and on the back wall is a misty woodland, the trees bare of any leaves.

A wooden building is brought on to the right of the stage, with some tables and stools as workers arrive with pitchforks and scythes and sheaves of wheat. Some sit at the table drinking, as though at a country inn.

Further on, a starry sky appears with the gable of a church and a cross on its steeple in silhouette. To our left, a wall glides in: an oak-panelled room with a large table with silver candlesticks placed on it.

Midway from front to back are a massive pair of dusty, wooden gates that span the width of the stage. These appear to be made of offcuts and random pieces of wood here and there. High up in these gates are a few small arch-shaped windows allowing some light in. They open down the centre, pulling away from us.

Later, we arrive in a factory scene. Here, the back wall is broken up into long window panes. At the back, men come and go bringing in barrels and crates. To the centre is a long wooden table where seamstresses sit on stools and work. Over on the left is the foreman’s desk, with a single tall stool placed next to it. Outside the factory, the stage is cleared again, with a cloudy sky projected behind, with chimneys on factories belching smoke into the air.

The rickety wooden buildings return, on both sides now, with the winding wooden stairways leading to doors on the first floor. Each doorway has a red lantern lit outside it. This is the dockside, with still water and hundreds of moored ships projected on the screen behind. The space towards the front is left empty.

The massive gates return, not fully closing, and an upper gallery is created by the wooden steps. A banner revealing the scales of justice is hung, and a judge stands before a flag bearing the word “Égalité”.

In a convent, a grey curtain is drawn on the left hand side of the stage, and a white iron-framed single bed is placed before it. The bed is dressed in clean, crisp, white sheets. On the wall behind: a projection of a large Georgian window and a peaceful convent garden beyond.

All this is whisked away, leaving the stage bare for a moment with a dark woodland projected behind. The inn of Monsieur and Madame Thénardier is quickly assembled by creating an archway of stairs at the back and placing tables and stools around for the customers. At the front, on our right is a long table with a meat mincer, an earthenware jug, some goblets and a baguette.

Back in the city of Paris, the dusty three-storey buildings are drawn on towards the front and meet in the middle. Two male students hang a flag over a balcony with “Vive LaMarque” written on it. At the end of the scene, the buildings pull apart revealing a projection of the Paris skyline at night with the twin steeples of Notre Dame in the centre.

A stone balustrade is lowered onto the stage with a starry Parisian night sky beyond, placing us on one of the many bridges across the Seine. Every few metres along this stone balustrade is an ornate wrought-iron streetlamp with a pale yellow flame.

Later, the gates close again and a set of steps descends from right to left, creating a basement café where the young students gather. The title “Le Café Musain” is painted in faded letters across the wooden background, and daylight streams in from the small arched windows above. A large red cloth is draped over some wooden crates. Stools and tables are placed around with bottles of beer and small tankards here and there.

Next we arrive at a well-to-do house on the edge of a city park. The back wall projection shows tall trees and neatly mowed lawns. The corner of this granite house is drawn in on our left. It too has three storeys. On the ground floor is a large wooden front door. Above this on the first floor is an iron balcony with French doors behind it. There are lace curtains on the windows and lamps are lit in the room revealing the inhabitants moving about. Outside the house is a small yard bounded by tall iron railings, painted black, set into a low stone wall, with a tall gate midway along.

We return to central Paris as a moving projection of Parisian streets draws us down the broad boulevards.

Later, a barricade is constructed, using many of the wooden steps, carts, tables and wheelbarrows used in previous scenes. It is piled high towards the back of the stage.

A daring escapes through Parisian sewers and catacombs is shown through projecting the cavernous arched tunnels on the back wall, with mist flooding the stage.

Later still, a wedding takes place as a cathedral with ornate stained-glass windows is shown behind, and a feast afterwards with tables draped in white linen and fine silverware.

**ABOUT THE CAST & COSTUMES**

The main characters are described below, with the rest of the cast described in the groups in which they appear (prisoners, peasants, beggars etc.).

**Jean Valjean**, played by **Killian Donnelly**, first appears in the ragged clothes of a prisoner. A young man with blond hair and beard, he wears tattered and dirty beige linen tunic and trousers with a thin overcoat. His prisoner number 2-4-6-0-1 is stitched into his clothing and branded onto his chest in angry red scarring.

Later on, he reappears, now the mayor of a small town, wearing a bottle-green frock coat, embroidered pale gold waistcoat, shirt and cravat, with grey trousers and shoes. Later still, Valjean returns in a suit of dark grey, with a pale blue silk waistcoat. Each time, he ages a little more, his hair thinning and greying.

This role is understudied by **Zac Hamilton** and **Aaron-Pryce Lewis** and has been performed by them occasionally during the Dublin run.

**Javert**, the captain of the boat where Valjean is a prisoner, is a very tall man with dark brown hair, sideburns and furrowed brows. Played by **Nic Greenshields**, he stands upright, always appearing smartly dressed in uniform. At first he wears a soldier’s uniform in navy serge with red lapels and cuffs. His uniform coat is dotted with gleaming brass buttons and he wears a black bicorne hat with red feather plume to one side. Later on, as a member of the police force, his uniform is all navy serge, with double breasted jacket dotted with silver buttons and a plain bicorne hat.

The **Bishop of Digne** is played by **Brian James Leys**, a slim man with black curly hair greying at the temples. He wears a black soutane edged with red piping and a large cross hangs on a chain around his neck.

**Fantine**, the seamstress, is played by **Katie Hall**. A young woman with long blonde hair, she wears a pale blue dress, once a very fine gown, but now a little faded and worn. Her hair is tied back neatly and covered with a scarf. She has blue eyes and a pretty face.

The **Factory Foreman**, played by **Jordan Simon Pollard**, is tall and brutish, with dark hair. He wears a brown frock coat, beige waistcoat and breeches and long, black leather riding boots.

**Little Cosette**, Fantine’s daughter, has brown hair and is about five years old. A small, thin child, she wears a murky brown ragged dress and shawl and carries either a broom or a heavy water bucket wherever she goes. This role is shared by **Mae Higgins**, **Abigael Adeva** and **Aoibhe Moore**.

**Madame Thénardier** is played by **Sophie-Louise Dann**. A gruffly spoken woman in her thirties, she has wild, frizzy red hair piled up on top of her head, poking out in every direction. She wears a dusty blue dress and white apron. Much later on, she returns in finery, a purple silk dress with her wild hair tamed into ringlets, and her face heavily made up with white powder and rosy red cheeks.

Her husband, **Monsieur Thénardier**, is played by **Martin Ball**. A tall, skinny man in his forties, he is dishevelled and wears an old soldier’s uniform – a blue and red coat with brass buttons, with a greying shirt and brown trousers. Over this he wears a battered leather butcher’s apron. His brown hair is thinning and scruffy and he wears a black beret. His tan suede, heeled shoes are well-worn.

Their daughter, **Young Eponine**, is also about five years old, and a little taller than Cosette.

She has long, curly brown hair and wears a pretty blue dress with flower pattern on it, and a blue bonnet. This role is shared by **Molly Hughes**, **Aleece Alinquant** and **Tess Mullarkey**.

**Cosette**, as a teenager, is played by **Bronwen Hanson**. She has soft, wavy brown hair and wears a beautiful silk dress in dove grey and pale blue stripes with a matching bonnet. She first appears carrying a basket and wearing a green woollen overcoat.

**Eponine**, also a teenager, is played by **Tegan Bannister**. Her curly black hair falls around her shoulders and she wears a red beret. Her sallow skin contrasts with her white cotton sleeveless blouse worn over a plain fawn-coloured full woollen skirt with a thick belt cinching her waist.

A young boy called **Gavroche** carries messages through the streets of Paris. He is about ten years old, with messy brown hair and fearless. Gavroche is dressed in rags: a blue shirt, brown waistcoat and flat cap and black trousers. This role is shared by **Charlie Hagen**, **Rodney Watts** and **Max Mackintosh**.

Among the students that frequent Le Café Musain is **Marius**, played by **Harry Apps**. He is a short and slight young man with dark hair and a pale face. He is well-dressed in a blue frock coat with silver silk waistcoat and cravat, over dark trousers.

His friend **Enjolras** is played by **Will Richardson**. A tall young man with blonde curly hair, he wears a white shirt and black trousers with a red waistcoat and black tie. He later appears in a different red waistcoat, like part of a military uniform with heavy gold braiding across the front, which he wears open. Here too, Enjolras wears the French tricolour sash as a belt on his trousers, as many of the other students do.

The rest of the company play a variety of crowds during the show. The chain gang in which Valjean serves all wear the same beige tatty rags as they row the ship. Javert’s soldiers and constables wear navy uniforms with red detailing on the coats of the soldiers and plain navy for the police, all wearing bicorne hats.

A pimp in the red light district wears an elaborate bottle green coat with burgundy waistcoat. He is well-dressed compared with the whores he manages. They wear silk gowns, or corsets with cotton underwear, all faded and threadbare, though once they may have been beautiful. They wear stockings that roll up to the knee, held in place by tatty garters.

The peasants in the countryside wear simple clothes. The men wear shirts and woollen trousers and the women, blouses and full skirts. Though well-worn, they are neat and in an array of autumnal colours.

The beggars in Paris, however, are all dressed in ragged clothes in muted browns and greys. Though they wear the same style of clothes, they are in much worse condition, their faces gaunt.

The factory girls where Fantine works all wear blue cotton dresses and scarves on their heads.

The young male students in Le Café Musain are young gentlemen of the middle and upper classes. They are all well-dressed in frock coats and ornate waistcoats with foppish hair.

The wedding guests in the second half of the show are all immaculately dressed in Victorian silk gowns with hooped skirts, and frock coats and waistcoats for the gentlemen in a dazzling array of colour.

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That concludes the introductory notes for this production of **Les Misérables**. They were prepared by Bríd Ní Ghruagáin. The show will be described by Máirín Harte and Bríd Ní Ghruagáin. Audio description at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre is provided by Arts and Disability Ireland with support from The Arts Council.

Thank you.