

FHS Presents Made in Dagenham at The Adelphi Theatre

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On Tuesday 1st February 2022, students all the way from Year 7 to Year 13 at Francis Holland School, Sloane Square, delivered a spectacular performance of the unique musical Made in Dagenham at the legendary Adelphi Theatre, one of Andrew Lloyd-Webber's family of six magnificent theatres in the heart of London's West End. Fittingly, the first ever theatrical performance of the show took place at the very same theatre in 2014. This made the occasion particularly special, as did the fact that it was the school's first, one-night-only West End performance since Singin' in the Rain at The Shaftesbury in 2019 due to the pandemic, the first time the show has been resurrected by a school cast in the West End and, remarkably, the first day the girls were able to rehearse in the theatre; all previous rehearsals having taken place in the school hall. The performance attracted an audience of over 500 and there was a true buzz of excitement in the packed auditorium which grew more and more palpable as the night progressed.

Made in Dagenham is a musical based on the 2010 film of the same name, which explores the story of the Ford sewing machinists' strike of 1968. In a tenacious struggle for equality, we follow heroine Rita O'Grady and other female workers at Ford's Dagenham plant as they strike to combat the inequality that becomes apparent when it is announced that the stitching room workers will have their pay grade dropped to unskilled. The plot is based on real-life events which eventually led to the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1970. There were too many highlights of the show to mention, but one particularly memorable moment was when a real-life Ford car, one of many fantastic props sourced and embellished by the FHS Art and Facilities Departments, was wheeled on stage for the rollicking musical number Cortina.

Iconic performances from leading cast members Sofia Gironi (Year 11) as Rita O'Grady and Cara Vogels (Upper Sixth) as Eddie O'Grady, plus the rest of the cast who truly brought the play to life, illustrated the great adversity that these inspirational women faced on their journey. The immense grit, determination and resilience displayed by these women half a century ago mirrors similar qualities in our own cast and crew, who have worked tirelessly throughout the rehearsal process. Putting on a show whilst still in the midst of a global pandemic has produced some nuanced challenges, yet the girls continued to push on throughout with tireless optimism and enthusiasm.

Headmistress Lucy Elphinstone has highlighted the poignancy of the choice of Made in Dagenham as this year's West End performance:

"The story of the Ford women of Dagenham, who fought for their voice to be heard and for equality of pay and opportunity, mirrors the struggle of our school over decades to empower its girls to believe that they have as much right as boys and men to be treated with respect and justice, to be independent and free, to realise their dreams."

Indeed, encouraging girls to develop the resilience, imagination and confidence to pursue their wildest passions is one of our most distinctive aims as a school and this is uniquely nurtured by our superb FHS Drama Department.

FHS has long been famed for its excellent reputation for Performing Arts, with notable alumnae including Sienna Miller and Emerald Fennell, to name only a few, and every year a number of Upper Sixth leavers are awarded places at leading Drama schools. We believe that drama fosters community and facilitates communication. It is a medium by which young people, through the power of language and image, can come to know themselves and others better.

With 12 productions per year, varying from Physical Theatre to Classic Theatre to Musical Theatre, there are countless opportunities for girls to get involved in Drama at FHS, and in doing so develop their creativity and refine their problem-solving skills. Beyond the curriculum, girls are frequently involved in institutions such as the National Youth Theatre, the Royal Court Theatre and the RADA Youth Theatre, and we have been privileged to be able to host workshops with some of the country's most ground-breaking and influential modern theatre companies such as Frantic Assembly and YoungBlood Fight Directors.

Congratulations to all of girls, staff (particularly our incredible Drama and Music Departments) and crew involved in overcoming multiple unforeseen obstacles and showing true FHS resilience to produce such a brilliant show, and thank you so much to The Adelphi for allowing us to usurp Back to the Future for 24 hours. It was impossible not to leave the theatre with a spring in your step, and all who attended were in agreement that it is an honour it was to be part of such a vibrant, talented and joyful school community. We look forward to watching our pupils' promising acting careers continue to flourish in years to come.

