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**SALOS**

**'Evita'**

**Wyvern Theatre, Swindon**

**18<sup>th</sup> October 2025**

**Director:** Russell Langdown    **Musical Director:** Richard Abrams  
**Chorus Music Director:** Judith Sharp    **Choreographer:** Gemma Langdown  
**Stage Manager:** Sarah Wrixon

**PLEASE NOTE:**

*Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what he sees at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance, and it is inevitable that his assessment will be effected by that knowledge.*

*The N.O.D.A. Representative's intention is to give an objective critique of the overall production and in particular the performance viewed. It should be remembered that any review of this nature can only be objective as far as the techniques used during the performance observed. Any criticisms expressed may not have been valid at other performances, and are only made to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.*

*It is hoped that the audience's appreciation of your efforts will have given everyone a lift and encouraged you to greater achievements in the future and that the observations made by the reviewer will prove helpful in improving future productions.*

## **Report by Angus Sheppard-Hughes SW Regional Representative District 16**

SALOS returned to the Wyvern Theatre this October with their latest production, the monumental Evita, and what an experience it was. From the opening projection to the final haunting reprise, this was a breathtaking evening of theatre that would rival many professional companies in both execution and heart. Under the direction of **Russell Langdown**, with musical direction by **Richard Abrams** and choreography by **Gemma Langdown**, Evita was staged with precision, passion, and a level of polish that reflected the sheer dedication and talent of everyone involved.

The musical tells the story of Eva Perón, the young Argentinian woman who rose from poverty to become the spiritual leader of her nation and eventually, a near-mythical figure. It's a show that demands both technical excellence and deep emotional connection, and SALOS achieved both in abundance. This production was an elegant balance of spectacle and sincerity: a richly sung, powerfully acted, and beautifully staged interpretation that held the audience spellbound.

### **Set and Staging**

The production used a fixed set with only minimal pieces brought on and off; chairs, tables, benches, allowing the fluid storytelling and musical continuity to remain uninterrupted. The hired-in set gave a polished, professional finish to the visual landscape, with intricate detailing on the platforms that gleamed under the lights. The decision to open with projections from Eva Perón's real life. Footage of the woman herself waving from the balcony. This immediately anchored the show in history and truth. It created an almost cinematic quality to the opening moments, transporting the audience into 1940s Argentina before a single line had been sung.

The opening sequence was nothing short of stunning. The choice to begin with a fully staged cinema scene, where Argentinians watch a film only for the screening to be interrupted by the news of Eva's death, was both powerful and poignant. The image of a shrouded woman approaching Eva's coffin and breaking down, before undressing to reveal herself as Eva "reborn", was theatrical storytelling at its finest. It set the emotional tone perfectly and gave the audience a visual motif that carried through the evening. Death and legacy intertwined.

Throughout, the staging remained fluid and clear. Transitions were seamless, maintaining pace in what is already a sung-through musical with little room for pause. The movement between scenes was smooth and precise, a testament both to **Russell Langdown's** clear direction and **Sarah Wrixon's** accomplished stage management.

### **Lighting and Sound**

Lighting design by **Will Burgher** and sound operation by **Rhys Plaister** were of an exceptionally high standard. The lighting captured the mood of every moment, shifting effortlessly from the harsh glare of political rallies to the soft, ethereal glow of Eva's private moments. Each cue felt purposeful and emotive.

The sound quality was also of professional calibre. Every vocal line was crystal clear, perfectly balanced with the orchestra, an achievement that's often difficult in a theatre of this size. My only personal note, and it truly is a matter of taste, is that I love to be *hit* by a wall of sound in the larger ensemble numbers; that swelling of music that pushes the emotion into your chest. In a few moments, particularly during "Buenos Aires," I found myself wanting just a touch more volume (or possibly Bass?) and punch to heighten the excitement. That said, the balance and clarity were so impeccable throughout that this minor wish in no way detracted from the overall brilliance of the sound design. Many professional tours could learn a thing or two from this team.

### **Costume, Props, and Makeup**

The costumes, though hired in, were stylish and well chosen for the piece. The production itself had a timeless quality, as though it could exist in any era, but the wardrobe still reflected the 1940s and 50s with elegance and authenticity. It's always a challenge in a show like *Evita* to remain culturally respectful while maintaining period accuracy, especially with a predominantly white cast. This production managed that balance admirably, though there were fleeting moments where the overall aesthetic felt slightly incongruent. That said, the costumes contributed beautifully to the storytelling, and the attention to detail in props and makeup was exceptional. Every element on stage looked purposeful and cohesive.

### **Musical Direction**

Musical Director **Richard Abrams** once again proved himself a master of his craft. Watching Richard conduct is always a joy, his enthusiasm and total immersion in the music radiate to every performer and musician. The orchestra was full, rich, and

beautifully balanced, producing a lush sound that filled the Wyvern with warmth and texture. The tempo, dynamics, and phrasing were handled with expert precision.

The ensemble vocals, under the guidance of Chorus Musical Director supreme **Judith Sharp**, were nothing short of exquisite. The harmonies were complex yet executed with total confidence; the sound was unified, powerful, and emotionally charged. It's no exaggeration to say that there were moments where you could close your eyes and imagine you were listening to a West End cast. The discipline and musicality of the company were exceptional.

## **Choreography**

Choreography by **Gemma Langdown** captured the tone and texture of the piece beautifully. The ensemble movement was tight, expressive, and respectful of the show's context. There were moments where the choreography was clearly inspired by previous professional versions, which is entirely understandable given how iconic certain sequences have become. "If it isn't broken, don't fix it" certainly applies here, the moments that borrowed from the show's legacy were executed with real flair.

Members of the chorus were included in all major numbers and that is something that I have commented on before with SALOS, being able to include all abilities within quite a complex piece, and Gemma knows how to adapt these moments to showcase every performer's strength while maintaining visual cohesion, but also accentuating the immense talent of the skilled dancers in the group. Overall, the choreography was vibrant, expressive, and perfectly matched to the score's energy and rhythm.

## **Performances**

Eva Perón – **Emily Louise Baker**

My partner said after watching SALOS's previous production of 9 to 5 that if the lady who played Judy didn't play Eva next, he'd have a fit. Well, here we are — and he was right. Emily, it looked as though you had waited your whole life to play Eva. (Even though Madonna thought she had too — and look how that turned out!) You did this role absolute justice. So many performers overplay Eva, layering on unnecessary grandeur when the woman herself was already a force of nature. You avoided every cliché. You were Eva — commanding the stage, the radio, the public, and the audience with effortlessness.

Yes, there were moments where your voice showed the natural fatigue that comes with performing such a demanding role multiple nights in a row, but you navigated those moments with remarkable skill — flipping between belt and head voice with control and musical intelligence. "You Must Love Me" was the emotional high point for me: it sat perfectly within your range, delivered with such purity that it cut through the air like silk. It's been over a week and that performance still lives in my mind rent-free. Brava.

### Che – **Luke Browne**

Another powerhouse. Luke, your voice carried immense strength, perfectly matched to the charisma and sharpness required of Che. You guided us through the story, bridging scenes with clarity and purpose, and when Eva wasn't on stage, it was your magnetism that kept the energy alive. Even when you weren't the focus, you remained compelling, fully in character, engaged, and aware that every moment counts.

One of the moments that most impressed me was small but telling: carrying two chairs offstage, still singing, narrating, and connecting with the audience without missing a beat. That's professionalism. I've never been a great lover of "High Flying, Adored" (it's always felt like a lull in the show for me) but your smooth, rich vocals and emotional honesty made me see it in a new light.

### Juan Perón – **Stuart McQuade**

I saw you as James in Kipps last year, and this was a complete transformation. You commanded the stage with gravitas and poise, embodying Perón's quiet authority and inner conflict. There was a suave stillness to your performance, a sense of a man who knows his power yet fears its fragility. Your chemistry with Emily as Eva was perfectly pitched, particularly in "I'd Be Surprisingly Good for You," which was a highlight of the evening. You balanced strength and vulnerability beautifully, giving a performance full of generosity and control.

### Magaldi – **Freddie Bennett-Gray**

Though your stage time was shorter, you made every moment count. Magaldi is a deceptively difficult role, setting the tone of Eva's early life, and you did so with great presence and vocal assurance. The rapport between you and Eva was authentic and engaging, and your reappearance later in the show was a welcome reminder of your character's lingering influence. A performance that clearly came from hard work and understanding.

### Mistress – **Sarah Legge**

AARGHHH — where have you been all my life? Do you ever wish you could erase something from your memory just to experience it again for the first time? That's how I felt about your rendition of "Another Suitcase in Another Hall." If I could, I'd listen to it on repeat and still never tire of it. My notes from that moment are an incoherent jumble of "wowowow," "vocals amazing," and "I'm addicted" — which pretty much says it all. It's been years since a single song moved me so profoundly. Stunning, heartfelt work.

### **Direction and Pacing**

**Russell Langdown's** direction brought coherence and sophistication to this complex, sung-through piece. The storytelling was clear and fluid, and even for those unfamiliar with Evita, the narrative was easy to follow, no small feat given its non-

linear structure. The pacing was exemplary, supported by smooth transitions and a confident command of the show's musical throughline.

The tone and atmosphere captured Argentina's emotional and political landscape with sensitivity. The production managed to convey both the adoration and the unease surrounding Eva's legacy, though (and this is a note aimed more at the show's original construction than at this production) there are moments where one wishes for a deeper sense of the anti-Peronist perspective. Nonetheless, **Russell's** direction ensured that the production felt emotionally honest and dramatically complete.

### **Audience and Hospitality**

The audience was captivated from the start and completely invested by the end, responding with a full standing ovation as Eva reappeared for the curtain call. The sense of pride and admiration in the room was palpable.

Front of house, led by the ever-wonderful Steph Trinci, was exemplary. Steph greeted us warmly and spoke with genuine affection for the company and its members. It was clear that SALOS is a family. One that supports, uplifts, and celebrates one another. The atmosphere in the theatre, both front and back of house, reflected that spirit perfectly.

### **Special Highlights and Final Thoughts**

Two words... The Dress. You know the one. That iconic, radiant gown was as much a character in the show as Eva herself, and its reveal was met with audible gasps from the audience. Do you ever get that feeling you're being upstaged by a dress?

SALOS's Evita was, in every sense, a triumph. A production brimming with talent, heart, and precision, a testament to the company's professionalism and love of musical theatre. From the first haunting note to the final fading image, this was a show that demanded attention and earned every ounce of applause it received.

Congratulations to the entire company, creative team, and crew for delivering a production of such quality and emotional power. Evita is a challenging piece by any measure, but SALOS rose to it with grace, artistry, and fire. Truly, a performance to remember.

*These comments solely reflect the view of the representative and can only relate to the performance seen.*