

# SIX

TEEN EDITION

It was a pleasure to return to the Greig Hall to visit the talented Top Box team once again, this time for a performance of *Six (Teen Edition)*. This is a show that I have never before seen in any of its versions, so it was in a spirit of expectant curiosity that I took my seat to the sounds of tinkly harpsichord music, nicely setting the scene for our trip back to Tudor England.

*Six* tells the story of the wives of Henry VIII, very much from the perspective of the women themselves. It takes the format of a concert performance, in which each of the wives sings, in chronological order, of their life story, in a different style depending on their character (but largely in the modern pop genre). These songs are bookended by the song 'Ex Wives' – the only one I had heard before – with an amusing German-techno number about Court painter Hans Holbein leading us into the interval.

Top Box presented this show over four performances, with two teams of principals – Gold and Purple (very royal!) – taking it in turns in the limelight. On the performance that I attended, it was Team Gold in the hot seat, with members of Team Purple joining the 'Royal Court Company' in the ensemble.

First up, following the well-performed, all-cast opening, was Erin L., whose song 'No Way' showcased the strong-willed Catherine of Aragon very effectively. Eden T. followed this up with a self-obsessed Anne Boleyn, whose sorry not sorry attitude in 'Don't Lose Your Head' neatly highlighted her adulterous relationship with Henry. As Jane Seymour, Emma W.'s 'Heart of Stone' was a suitably earnest song that had more of a musical theatre feel to it than the more pop-oriented numbers that preceded it. I thought this one featured some nice backing vocals which added to the mood. The first half was brought to a rousing conclusion in the 'Haus of Holbein' – a really fun number which saw the cast really let their hair down for a techno/biergarten mashup, complete with fluorescent picture frames and flashing spectacles. This also provided an opportunity for the lighting team to really get involved, which they certainly took!

Into the second half, and Lydia S got us off to a rousing start as a sassy Anne of Cleves (she of the Holbein portrait) with 'Get Down'. This song featured a neat link to modern dating, as her portrait is compared to online profile pictures – very clever! Next up, 'All You Wanna Do', sung by Caitlin B. as Katherine Howard, riffed on her reputation as a renowned beauty, and featured some nice acting as the character slowly realised the trouble she was in. Finally, Darci H.'s Catherine Parr sang a torch song to her lost love with 'I Don't Need Your Love' – a strong performance to cap off the sequence and lead us into the final, rousing song, in which the wives put their differences aside to take control of their own history.

My congratulations to the entire cast – both the six wives and the ensemble, who added greatly to the sound and the staging whenever they appeared. The confidence and enjoyment of these young performers was a pleasure to behold. The finale was an absolutely joyous moment – how great to see the love of the material and of being on stage really shine through. They received a rapturous response from the audience, and quite right too!



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The show was confidently directed by Georgie Pearce and Tracy Anne Wright, with a clear and understandable emphasis on choreographing the songs, which resulted in some very effective moments. I did wonder if there could have been a bit more movement incorporated into the linking dialogue sections, which provided an opportunity to flesh out the characters. I liked how the level of bickering increased as the show went on, until the wives realised their strength lay in each other.

The lead performers all used prop microphones throughout the performance (with radio mics actually picking up the vocals). Whilst I recognise that this is true to the original style of the play, I thought it might have been interesting to see what would have happened if they had simply used the radio mics, freeing up both hands to act out their characters. But no matter, as it was the mics were confidently handled by the performers throughout.

Costuming was also well handled, as each of the wives wore an outfit that, if not exactly faithful to Tudor design, was appropriate to both their character and the style of the show.

My thanks to all at Top Box for inviting me to what was, once again, a thoroughly invigorating live performance. It's clear to see that the next generation of musical theatre performers are in safe hands, and that the creative team of Tracy, Georgie, George and Lucy are going from strength to strength. I look forward to seeing you all let it go with Frozen Jr in November!

Chris Davies