

Thalian Theatre Company

The Great British Bake Off Musical

Thalian Theatre Wednesday 9th June 2026

Director – Darren Barsby

Musical Director – Chris Burrett

Choreographer – Courtney Cole

The Great British Bake Off Musical is a musical based on the TV programme of the same name.

Darren Barsby, the director, had clearly thought carefully about the staging of this production. There are limitations to the Thalian stage, but Darren adapted the locations in the script to work for the space — and as normal as that sounds, not all directors think like that. The locations were not as vital as the characters' stories, and that is what I walked out remembering. Good job, Darren.

Chris kept the band tight and had obviously worked with the company on their harmonies; they were well defined.

Courtney Cole created some lovely, choreographed moments. When there is a larger cast, sight lines become important, and unfortunately some of the cast were masked in the bigger numbers, especially in the opening.

There were clever uses of the chorus, with make-up ladies and camera and sound crew being on stage. This meant they were there to help with the vocals, and it also worked in the context of what this musical is about.

Gemma, played by MJ Scott, is for me the heart of the show. She is one half of the love story, and I think the audience goes on a journey with her. We can all relate to her insecurities and nerves. MJ has a fabulous voice, and she not only showed her range but also her ability to tell a story through song.

Ben, the other half of the love story, was played by Neville Stratton. His relationship with his daughter Lily (Millie Arnold in the performance I saw) was believable and heart-warming. Millie was excellent as Lily — a beautiful solo and a confident performance.

The confident and win-at-all-costs Izzy was played by Emma Gilby. Another strong character, she came across as someone with an ego who *had* to win, no matter what.

Gemma Capon took on the role of Francesca. She has one of the most sensitive storylines in the show, and I must commend the society, Darren, and Francesca for not only ensuring that warnings were present around the building, but also for portraying the subject with care. It was a poignant moment, beautifully handled and sung.

Kay Ward has a stunning voice and playing Babs she got to show this off in style during *Babs' Lament* — a great number.

Harrison Huntley took on the role of the vegan cook Dezza. He may have been eliminated early, but Dezza makes his presence felt throughout the rest of the show.

One of the best performances came from Chris White as Russell. I smiled every time he appeared. He made the most of every moment and earned many laughs — a lovely performance.

Jay Puranik played Hassan, and he gave a very passionate performance. It was obvious how much this part meant to him, and it came across to the audience.

The hosts of Bake Off, Kim and Jim, were played by Jenny Lewin and Sean Bailey. Their energy as a pairing was good, and they worked well together. I could understand why they faced the camera; however, there were moments when they masked each other due to sight lines — though this may have been my viewpoint.

The judges, Phil Hollinghurst (Pip Grey) and Pam Lee (Mary Goodfellow), were good takes on their television counterparts. Pip's Liverpudlian accent was strong for most of the show, and I enjoyed *Slap It Like That* — he gave it a lot of energy and gusto. Mary, as Pam, was a great take on Prue Leith. They worked well as a team, supporting and bouncing off each other.

The set was well designed, with the benches and staging making it feel like we were inside the tent. The set helped with transitions and kept the pace quick and tight.

Having never seen this musical before, I was really looking forward to it, and The Thalian Theatre Company have proved they are not afraid to take on new shows — and do them well!

Scott Welch

NODA Representative - NODA East District 9

NODA owns the intellectual Property Rights to the content of all show reports written by NODA Councillors, Reps and Assistant Reps