My Fair Lady: When a Man Loves a Woman...

Last year’s first-rate production of My Fair Lady at Ocean State Theater Company set the bar pretty high for other acting companies to reach. Fortunately, Theatre By The Sea managed to capture the magic with some charming performances accented by a brilliant book and music by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe.

Television star Charles Shaughnessy (“The Nanny,” “Days of Our Lives”) stars as the refined linguistics professor Henry Higgins, who discovers Eliza Doolittle selling flowers on a London street. Higgins hopes to teach the crude and uneducated woman some proper decorum in order to fit into English society.

At first, it seemed Shaughnessy was playing the role too broadly, but his performance really grew on me. Shaughnessy displayed some sharp comic timing and was superb on “A Hymn to Him” when Higgins wonders “why a woman can’t be more like a man.” Another highlight was “I’ve Grown Accustomed To Her Face,” when Higgins proclaims his love for Eliza.

The real star of this production, however, was Kerry Conte, who showed the right amount of grit and determination as Eliza. Conte also is a fabulous singer. She excelled on “Just You Wait,” “Wouldn’t It Be Loverly” and “I Could Have Danced All Night.”

The supporting performances were outstanding across the board, especially Tom Gleadow as Colonel Pickering and Bill E. Dietrich as Eliza’s drunken father, Alfred. Dietrich brought a madcap zany energy to the role and had a ball with “Get Me to the Church on Time.” Zachary Berger was charming as Freddy, who becomes smitten with Eliza. He sings the sweet ballad, “On The Street Where You Live.”

Overall, this version of My Fair Lady delivers. It’s sweet and has some wonderfully funny moments. The interplay between Eliza and Higgins anchors the drama and makes one think of how men and women treat each other in contemporary society. Their relationship is alternately tender and fractious and is one of the reasons why this show continues to endure.

My Fair Lady runs Jun 24 – Jul 18, Tues through Sun. Check the website for exact dates and show times. Tickets are on sale by phone at 401.782.8587, online at theatrebythesea.com, or in person at 364 Cards Pond Road, Wakefield.