



## **The Gilberd School: Hunchback of Notre Dame - A Breathtaking Triumph**

As an NSTA representative, I had the pleasure of attending The Gilberd School's production of Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* on Wednesday 12th February 2025. This production was nothing short of spectacular. Taking on such a mature and emotionally complex musical is an ambitious feat for any school, but this cast and creative team rose to the challenge with professionalism, passion, and an extraordinary level of talent.

*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is a musical based on Victor Hugo's 1831 novel and the 1996 Disney movie of the same name, with music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, and a book by Peter Parnell. Set in medieval Paris, it tells the story of Quasimodo, a bell-ringer at the Notre Dame Cathedral, who was abandoned as a baby and raised by the cruel archdeacon, Frollo. Quasimodo is isolated and rejected due to his physical deformity but longs for acceptance and love.

From the moment the show began, the audience was transported to 15th-century Paris. The set design was simple yet incredibly effective, evoking the grandeur of Notre Dame itself. A strikingly effective flat screen at the back of the stage projected the famous stained-glass windows of the cathedral and seamlessly transitioned between locations, making scene changes feel fluid and immersive. The decision to place the live band on a higher level was a masterstroke, allowing the audience to fully appreciate the powerful and emotive score that underpinned the entire production.

The opening number set the standard for the rest of the show, with a small group of students playing the Congregation. Not only did they sing a cappella in complex harmonies, but they also performed in Latin—a remarkable achievement. The dedication and hard work of both the Production Team and the students were evident in the outstanding vocal quality. Their hooded costumes and lit lanterns enhanced the atmosphere every time they entered the stage, and their seamless transition into Quasimodo's gargoyle friends, marked by simple yet effective headpieces, was a clever touch.

Felix, in the title role of Quasimodo, delivered an unforgettable performance. Playing a character described as grotesque and ostracised is no easy task, especially for a teenager, but Felix balanced Quasimodo's gentle, kind nature with his inner strength beautifully. His vocal performance of 'Out There' was breath-taking, filled with longing and hope, leaving the audience utterly spellbound. A particularly striking aspect of his performance was his consistent physical portrayal of Quasimodo—hunched over in a lower, more submissive stance than the villainous Frollo—until the climactic moment when he overpowered his "Master," straightened his posture, and revealed his true strength.

Ginevra gave a mesmerising performance as Esmeralda, embodying the strength,



compassion, and resilience of the character with a maturity beyond her years. Her rendition of 'God Help the Outcasts' was deeply moving, leaving many audience members—myself included—teary-eyed. Esmeralda is a complex role, requiring an actress playing the part to become the love interest of three other characters and display a range of relationships with them; love, friendship and hatred. Ginevra did so with grace and conviction and deserved the cheers and applause after each solo.

Noah and Harrison also deserve special mention for their performances as Frollo and Phoebus. Noah faced the ambitious challenge of portraying the sinister and morally conflicted Frollo, yet he performed with such conviction and intensity that his character's villainy was truly chilling. Meanwhile, Harrison, as the dashing hero Phoebus, displayed impressive vocals and charm—making it no surprise that Esmeralda falls for him.

The ensemble cast was a particular highlight, working cohesively to create stunning theatrical moments throughout the show. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is not necessarily known for its ensemble focus, but the creative team ensured every performer was fully engaged in telling the story. Each student remained consistently in character, reacting with authenticity and commitment, adding depth and vibrancy to the production. The soldiers' fight scene was particularly thrilling, and the energy during the Festival of Fools never wavered.

Early in the show, it is mentioned that Quasimodo struggles to hear due to the deafening sound of the bells he is forced to live with. The decision to conclude the production with the entire ensemble signing the final song to him after Esmeralda's death was profoundly moving, highlighting the inclusivity of this cast and production.

This production was a true testament to the dedication and talent of both the cast and the creative team. The Gilberd School took on an ambitious and challenging musical and executed it to perfection. Every element—acting, singing, dancing, staging, and direction—came together to create a performance that felt as polished and impactful as a professional production. I am sure these students realise how lucky they are to attend a school that values the Arts so highly and offers these incredible inclusive opportunities.

The standing ovation at the finale was thoroughly deserved, and I can confidently say this was one of the finest school productions I have ever had the privilege of attending. Bravo to everyone involved!

**National School Theatre Awards**

**@schooltheatreawards**

**[www.schooltheatreawards.com](http://www.schooltheatreawards.com)**



**MINISTRY**  
OF SCHOOL ARTS