

Phantom of The Opera
Angel of Music Returns
by Madison Young

“*Phantom of the Opera*,” one of the most famous musicals of all time, premiered at the Majestic Theatre on November 5, and completed its run on November 15. Following their sold-out tour in the United Kingdom, Cameron Mackintosh’s production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s timeless tale of the Opera Populaire’s resident phantom launched its North American Tour and will be traveling along the path of all the Broadway classics. Boasting a cast and orchestra of 52, this production is bigger and better than ever before.

The story follows the elusive Phantom (Chris Mann) and his quest to win the heart of Christine Daae (Katie Travis, but played by understudy Celia Hottenstein), his young protégé. It begins with a broken and dusty Populaire hosting an auction, and then falls into the past as the curtains raise and the cobwebs vanish. The old theatre is suddenly bursting with life, as the troupe’s rehearsal for “*Hannibal*” is underway. The Prima Donna, La Carlotta (Jacquelynne Fontaine) is replaced by Christine, who sparks the interest of former childhood sweetheart, Raoul, Vicomte de Chagny (Storm Lineberger). Meanwhile, the mysterious Phantom controls the Populaire from behind the scenes, much to the dismay of new managers, Messrs. Firmin (David Benoit) and André (Andrew Staudenmayer), and strives to make Christine realize that he is more than the monster behind the mask.

The production includes a dazzling array of props, including the spinning set that holds every room needed for the performance, beautiful costumes, pyrotechnics, and the infamous chandelier that sits above the crowd. Perhaps one of the most stunning scenes is that of the Masquerade, with swirling costumes and exquisite dancing reflecting off the inverted mirror on the ceiling, creating an unforgettable moment that draws the audience in like no other.

Chris Mann has a soulful voice that captures the dark depression and self-loathing of the Phantom perfectly, harkening back to when Michael Crawford took the stage. His voice combined with that of Celia Hottenstein sent goosebumps into the crowd during one of the most famous songs in the play, “*The Phantom of the Opera*.” Other voices, such as the powerful Jacquelynne Fontaine showcase the talented troupe and gives a new message to the story. Traditionally, La Carlotta is made to sound shrill, hitting ugly notes at times. In this production, she was a better singer than Christine, which added a new twist to the story that was perhaps more heartbreaking in the end; the Phantom did what he did because he loved Christine, not because he loved the arts.

The Mackintosh production of “*The Phantom of the Opera*” is a beautiful rendition of the old tale, with enough new props, new versions of characters, and new plot lines that create a uniquely poignant story. *Bulldog Times* rates this production a five out of five paws.