



June 3rd Evening



CAST



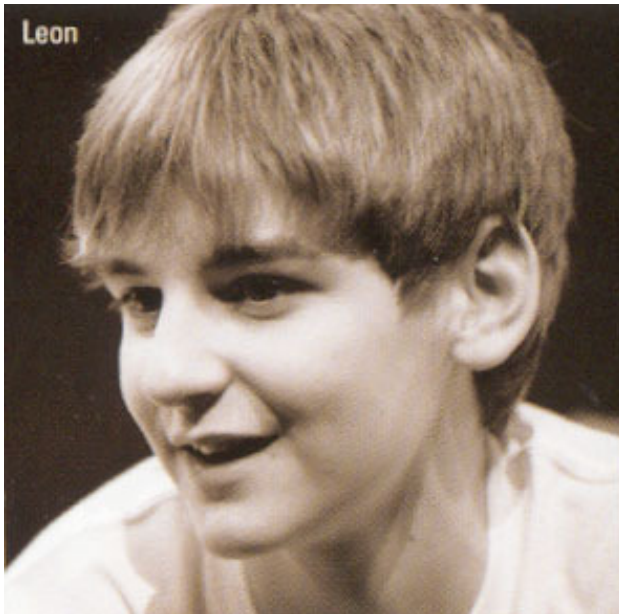
Haydn Gwynne

Mrs Wilkinson



David Bardsley

Dad



Leon Cooke

Billy



Joey Phillips

Michael



Emma Hudson

Debbie



Chris Lennon

Tony



Ann Emery

Gran



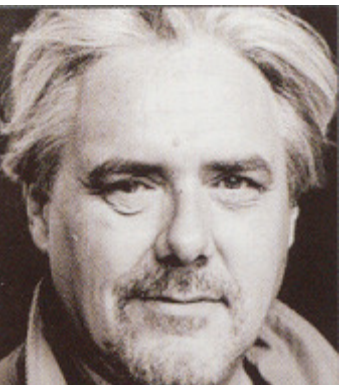
Stephanie Putson

Dead Mum



Alex Delamere

Mr Braithewaite



Paul Broughton

George



Introduction

Hello forum members.

This was such an emotional day and also a very important one in the history of Billy Elliot. The final day for Haydn Gwynne, Stephanie Putson, Joey Phillips, Emma Hudson along with the ballet girls and various members of the ensemble. Many forum members attended both shows, and were treated with fantastic performances. From reading these reviews you will discover that everyone was very emotional, however sadly times do have to change. Personally (having attended the evening performance) I can say it was a truly magical night at the theatre. Hopefully reading these reviews help to recreate the event in some form or another. Once again thank you for everyone who wrote the reviews...without you it couldn't have been possible!

Sparky



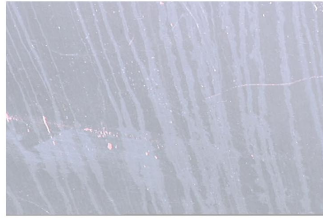
Stephen Daldry's Speech



“

Hello, I'm Stephen Daldry, I'm the director of Billy Elliot and I wanted to welcome you personally tonight to what is, to us, a very special evening. Tonight we are saying farewell to a number of members of our core company who have been with us for a very long time. They are an extraordinary and rather fantastic group of ballet girls, who have been with us from the beginning. They are Emma Hudson, who really created the role of Debbie, and I am so happy to be able to say to you what I was able to say to her parents in private, which is, not only is she a fantastic, brilliant actress and professional in the making, but she's a fantastic human being. [applause] This also applies to the very great and very wonderful Joey Phillips, who plays Michael, and this is his last performance as Joey really hurtles towards adolescence. [laughter] It's also the final performance of Stephanie Putson, who plays dead mum, and her warmth, good humour and generosity will haunt this production and this theatre for many years to come. And, it is of course the last performance of the great and very wonderful Haydn Gwynne who plays Mrs. Wilkinson. [applause] Haydn has been, very much, the rock on which this production has been built. She has been the centre of us as a company. It's a sort of old adage that you should never work with animals or children. Um, I in fact cut Mrs. Wilkinson's chihuahua early on in rehearsals [laughter]. But her generosity and warmth to the children, the many hundreds of children now that have been in the show, has been exceptional. Apart from her very warm, generous actions, she has also been a very brilliant, very powerful and very moving, very wonderful Mrs. Wilkinson. [applause] In our story, of course, all the characters I've mentioned make their farewells to Billy at the very end of the show. These moments are particularly poignant and will be excessively poignant for us this evening, so I ask your indulgence at our excessive emotionalism and I hope you have a great show. Thank you so much for being with us this evening. [applause]

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Well, call me cold-hearted but I have never cried at a performance of Billy Elliot before. Tonight was a different matter however - it was so emotional! Leon had me choked up with his tears during The Letter Reprise (I personally felt they were real tears and not acted.. your thoughts on this are welcome!), and then all it took was Joey sat on his bike during the (noticeably extended in length) curtain fall and just crying his eyes out. Blub.

Poor Emma was in tears at the start as well as the end (did anyone else near the front notice her teary eyes in the opening number?) and it was heart wrenching to watch all of those little ballet girls crying at the end of the finale! Being someone who has also stood in front of an audience during a curtain call and cried my eyes out (admittedly not a West end stage though!) I felt their pain so much!

Anyway.. on to my thoughts of the show. I'm sure someone will do a fantastic scene by scene review, so I'll pick out so notable highlights from my perspective.

Leon

He blew me away tonight! Some of you will know that I am a die-hard Liam fan and he will always be my favourite, however Leon is really getting close! I love the tenderness that he gives Billy and his dancing was awesome tonight. For me its all about the pirouettes, and his fouettes at the end of Electricity were faster than I've ever seen Liam do them. All credit to Leon - he's obviously been working really hard on his performance. The only quibble I had was that at the end of Angry Dance where the drum is banging and Billy does a different position on each beat he kept stopping, resetting himself back to centre stage and then starting the sequence again. I've not seen it done like this before and I thought it interrupted the flow a bit. He did look knackered though - so fair enough!

Other Thoughts

- The shouting in the finale was funny - everyone was shouting "come on Leon!" and then someone shouted "come on ballet girls!!"
- It was really lovely that the other Billies presented the leaving cast members with flowers at the end. A notable absence from George however..any thoughts?
- Didn't Stephen Daldry have some *lovely* words to say about Emma at the start of the show. No wonder she was crying!
- I can't end this review without a word about Hadyn. She has been such a fantastic Mrs Wilkinson and her performance tonight was electric. She put every ounce of effort into the show (as usual!) and I really enjoyed it. Any thoughts.. was there a few tears from her at the end too?

All in all a great night, and lovely to see you all again!

kjh888

On to the evening performance (since I only have 9 minutes of internet time left on my hotel computer . . .). I would have to say that it was everything I hoped it would be. It was my first time to see Leon and Joey. Leon also has a wonderful singing voice. He sounds like he could do quite well if he were to end up concentrating just on a singing career.

And Joey . . . everything I had heard about him was true. He really commands the stage when he's on it , with very clever mannerisms, poses, and voice inflections. He clearly has put a great deal of time and effort into forming his performance of Michael. After the show, he had hordes of fans waiting to pose for a picture and wish him well. He very kindly obliged on each autograph request and picture . . giving the famous Joey smile.

As the show began to draw to a close, one could sense the finality of the occasion for Stephanie, Joey, Tom Higgins, Michael Greenhill, Emma Hudson, and of course Haydn. It was impossible not to hear the words of the songs sung by the characters and not hear it as the actors saying the words to each other. . . . such as Billy (Leon) giving his thanks and farewell to Mrs. Wilkinson/Haydn. His choking up during the Letter Reprise seemed very genuine and heartfelt . . . one of the most emotional scenes I've seen in live theatre. And Leon's final hug good bye at the end of the scene was also a fitting thank-you and farewell by Leon to Joey.

Well, my time's up here so I'd better quit typing and send.

Todd

OK.....

This was the worst show ever for me (The performance, though, was very good). Firstly, I smell like I haven't took shower for a year (sorry, Mrs. Ianderwaruk). The underground company kept me sweating for 2 hours to and fro Heathrow, with replacement bus, wrong platform, etc. I also unexpectedly got a bad breath.

The good news is that unexpectedly I sat just behind Colin Bates (hi Colin!!), and the rest of Billies (except Leon), Michaels (except Joey) and their chaperones. It got really busy after they settled down. The annoying part is when a lady behind me (I really do hope she's not a member), asking me twice to get the boys' autographs, treating me like a robot (and without saying "please")

The performance, as I said, was wonderful. Haydn's final appearance and last disappearance was very sad. The saddest thing is when Leon sang the letter (reprise), and when he hugged Joey. I believe he was really crying, and didn't look happy afterwards. I forced myself to smile (cause I don't like to cry publicly). It was very touching moment.

Well done, to LEON, Joey, HAYDN, Stephanie, and the rest of the casts.

Didn't go to the stage door, as I want to get home quickly to do more sleeping, and revising, and packing. Deadline 7th June.

726

Tonight was amazing. I'm not sure my thoughts are coherent at this point, so I'll just post about some of the high points and other things I noticed.

I noticed that Emma was already teary-eyed at the beginning of the show, but she really pulled it together and did all her scenes flawlessly. I thought it was very sweet in her final scene (where Billy says goodbye to Mrs Wilkinson) when she leaned toward Leon and he gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Joey was fantastic and had the crowd eating out of his hand. The look on Leon's face when he felt Joey painting lipstick almost everywhere except his lips, was priceless! The chemistry between the 2 of them was wonderful, as Expressing Yourself progressed, it really seemed like they were spurring each other on. Both were totally out of breath by the end of the number. And at the end, as Michael alone on stage, watching Billy walk away down the aisle... I was crying.

Leon absolutely amazed me. He was so solid throughout the show, giving off such sincerity, humor and tenderness. I believe he really cried during The Letter (Reprise). I've always thought Liam would be my favorite Billy, not just coz he's great, but because he was the first one I saw; but Leon tonight is really close.

And Hadyn, I don't think I have the words to describe how good she is. She's so professional, so consistent, so true to the character... I can only wish her wonderful things for the future.

Also, James was in my line of sight as I was directly behind him, several rows back. It touched me that he still had to wipe away tears during The Letter and that he completely cracked up laughing when Joey painted all over Leon's face during Expressing Yourself.

carnimiri

The Billies (Matt, CVolin, Liam, Travis, plus Leyton and Dean) were in Row O of the stalls, along with the Michaels and various other children and two chaperones. Poor lads got badgered for autographs at every other opportunity. A couple of the Billies were in tears at the end, but they were really enjoying the performances and particularly supportive of Joey, leading the standing ovations. They were whisked away at the curtain call to go onto the stage at the very end with James Lomas who had been sitting elsewhere.

A particularly enjoyable performance, with the customary opening words from Stephen. I was a bit disappointed that Philip Whitchurch was not back for this special night, although David Bardsley is fine as dad. The audience, both Billy fans and 'normal' people were on good form tonight, cheering at every opportunity.

Leon is just so likeable as Billy, he has a cheery, cheeky personality and it's difficult not to fall in love with his Billy. He has a wonderful singing voice and he dances magnificently. A good Angry Dance, although I don't think it was as powerful as some - it's hard to imagine this laid-back Billy getting really angry - and a good Swan Lake, even though he was a bit out of synch with Issac at times. The other interesting thing was that Leon had changed his portrayal slightly at times to make sure he interacted with the different way David plays his dad.

Expressing Yourself was a ball. Leon and Joey have one of those special partnerships; I think that this is clearly a benefit of the previous system where each Billy had their own Michael. Joey has a natural stage presence and was out to milk his last performance. He plastered Leon with lipstick, leaving Leon to look in the Mirror at the back of the stage to see exactly what Joey had done to him.

Hadyn turned in another first class performance; if there's one niggle it is that Hadyn always seems to turn out (virtually) the same performance. I think she could have softened it for Matt's Billy. Still, that's a minor criticism of what has been a fabulous year for her. It's hard to believe she'll be gone on Monday. As widely anticipated her Goodbye to Billy was very moving. She was clapped off the stage at this point.

Chris

Tonight's show is possibly the most difficult to review because you really had to be there to feel the emotion, but I'll have a go anyway...

Stephen Daldry gave a nice speech at the beginning praising the ballet girls team and some lovely words about Emma, Joey, Stephanie and Haydn. Clearly all the departing members will be sorely missed by the company as well as us as fans.

Act I was superb - the pace was snappy and the dialogue and dances were all sharp. Haydn got a round of applause as soon as she entered and Shine got a very long and loud ovation from the audience. Likewise Solidarity got a huge round of applause at the end of the number.

Expressing Yourself was vintage Leon and Joey - Joey plastered the lipstick all over Leon's face to give him a rather scary smile throughout the number, and we were treated to all the usual banter plus some extras (Joey now has 'a huge massive arse' according to Leon). The main thing that shone through this scene is the amount of enjoyment that Leon and Joey have had in working together - a real sparkle between the two of them as always. Joey got a huge round of applause on his entrance and a thoroughly deserved standing ovation at the end of the number.

The Letter was performed in Leon's customary understated fashion - some very touching moments as usual in Leon's subtle acting and Haydn and Stephanie's warmth throughout the scene. Born to Boogie was superb - I was reminded about how fantastic Haydn's dance skills are as well as her singing and acting! The toilet scene between Debbie and Billy was very well timed as always between Emma and Leon, and the next scene with Mrs Wilkinson hugging Billy was particularly poignant. As always, Leon gave a passionate and sharp Angry Dance despite throwing his shoes at Row A of the stalls and a couple of slips in the dance.

Act II began with Merry Christmas Maggie Thatcher in typical riotous fashion - Joey and the ballet girls enjoying themselves hugely with one of the Maggie Thatcher masks! The Winter Scene was incredibly touching - Joey's acting here always brings a lump to my throat, and there was no disappointment tonight. Joey has always been superb at combining the outrageousness, innocence and vulnerability in Michael's character, perfectly foiled by Leon's slightly amused but very tender Billy.

Nice addition from Emma in the Mrs W-Dad scene - 'Mum - we've run out of jaffa cakes...'

As usual David and Chris gave us a passionate and physical 'He Could Be A Star', and the audition scene was carried off with its usual aplomb - with Leon taking his time over a rather badly behaved tape! Leon got a huge and very deserved ovation for a faultless Electricity complete with the new backflip in the end section.

The link scenes into the final goodbyes were strong as always - David Bardsley is so genuine and believable as Dad in all these scenes, ably supported by Chris and Ann Emery.

The first goodbye with the ballet girls and Haydn was very emotional - Emma giving Leon a peck on the cheek before she left, and Haydn carrying the scene off with her true professionalism, with just the long pause before the final line betraying the true poignancy of the words. Haydn got another round of applause as she left the stage for the final time.

Once We Were Kings had a slightly muted feel about it which added to the atmosphere - no final final goodbyes here but beautifully played by David and Leon with support from the ensemble.

The Letter (reprise) was incredibly moving, with Leon starting very softly and cracking within two lines, and even Stephanie was overcome by the end of the duet, with both on the verge of tears. So moving and so poignant, and a fitting tribute to Stephanie's beautiful and touching portrayal of Mum.

The final scene between Joey and Leon was the first time I've ever cried at the theatre. Leon was visibly choked as he first kissed Joey and then hugged him, a spontaneous and touching gesture that showed the closeness between the boys that has been so evident in making their partnership so successful. The scene with Joey left sobbing before the curtain came down was positively heartrending.

Several cast members were in tears for the curtain call (two full standing ovations), and Leon pulled Emma and Joey to the front to take a bow with him before the finale. The finale was danced superbly as always, and all the cast leavers were presented with bouquets by Billys past and present at the end.

Although the evening was full of memorable performances, I would like to particularly mention the sensitive way that Leon pulled all the farewell scenes together tonight. Leon was really wearing his heart on his sleeve and was incredibly effective throughout in what must have been an emotionally draining performance. It was so nice to see Leon get so much applause during tonight's performance - Leon thoroughly deserves this level of recognition in a special performance because he is, in the words of Mrs Wilkinson herself, "very f*****g special".

Finally, the amount that Haydn, Stephanie, Joey, Emma, Tom, Michael and all the ballet girls are going to be missed is immense. All of these actors are responsible for so many memorable performances, and I'm sure we'll remember their part in Billy for years to come, and in particular their part in tonight's very special and moving performance. 7th June.

thx, james. you're absolutely right, we could witness a VERY special performance tonight, you could just feel it.. the hug at the end of the final scene between leon and joey was not part of the performance.. it was REAL, as well as joey's tears when the curtain came down.... omg, that was touching

joey was definitely the star of the evening. he really seemed to enjoy giving thousands of autographs and posing for pictures after the show. it's soooo sad, that we won't see him on stage anymore, he's just a great kid, after all these amazing performances he always stayed modest and gave the role of michael his own special touch. i think the leon-joey couple just had the right chemistry (just like the george-brad couple).

streetdancer

The evening was as expected a night of mixed emotions. I was eager to see Leon perform. Well Leon is just brilliant, this boy can act. He brings so much to the role, he has the determined look, but a vulnerability that works so well. His speech is just so clear and strong, and I would recommend Leon to any of our members from distant shores who find the accent hard to catch.

Great command of the stage, I was hooked early in the show. All that was left was to reel me in, and boy did those final scenes do that, I have never been so moved since the first time I saw billy.

Yam!

Last night was one of the best of my life!!

It was so emotional as i thought all the cast were superb!

I was nearly in tears by the end when i saw Joey crying right at the end. it was great seeing some of you.

I didnt come and say hello as i didnt think you would want your evening ruined by a child coming to say hello. Lol.

I would have loved to say hello to Alan Roger who was sat right behind me!

But you were with your friends so i didnt.

I saw many other people as well. I recognised Paul and Lin and Jess.

It was really lovely to see you all!

The Show was fantastic, the best i had ever seen. What made the day even greater was that before the show i saw Leon and Liam walking down the street with their chaperones.

And also just before the show Me and my friend saw James by an ATM, he was more than happy to give an autograph lol!

Not only was i nearly in tears but i was laughing so much, i think people must have thought me quite rude

But it was my 1st time seeing Joey and Leon together! It was just magical!

Joey really is a natural. The lipstick had me in hysterics! I also noticed many changes from when i last saw it. It proves how much a show can change.

jamesrocks

Lovely to see so many forum members yesterday, and apologies to those I didn't get to chat to - where did the day go Superb performances yesterday, this was the first time I have seen Leon - he is just WONDERFUL, in every way. It was also my first time seeing Joey and of course the last, what a star, he and Leon had a wonderful time in Express and Joey received the well deserved recognition from the enthusiastic audience that he deserved.

Emmas as Debbie was clearly very emotional from the very start of the show but carried on as the true professional she is and gave a magnificent final performance as Debbie, I don't believe I have ever seen the 'fanny' scene performed to such comedic effect before

What can I say about Haydn? she has been such a consistent performer, always delivering top class performances, I will miss her a great deal.

Stephanie too, I will miss her beautifully sung gentle caring mum who has interacted so brilliantly with all the different Billys.

Mustn't forget to mention cute small boy Tom who was also performing for the last time, he went out on a high, receiving a huge round of applause for his w&*nker retort in the boxing scene

Some lovely touches last night and genuine affection demonstrated between the cast members. It will be a night I remember for a very long time

Fizzipop

Act 1

Stephen Daldry came on to introduce the show and tell us about all those whose last night it was, and he had huge praise for Emma so no wonder that in the The Stars Shine Down Emma was singing through her tears, and got a lovely supportive hug from Phil Snowden who she stands next to in that song. Every scene with Joey in it became 'heightened' just because he was in it! The boxing scene was funny as ever with Joey being dragged to the front by George and then getting his own back later with that punch to the ***** and that big Joey grin Hayden got a huge cheer as soon as she appeared on stage for the first time and even though I've seen it so many times I just love it when the ballet girls slam down those chairs. The ballet girls had a great time pushing Leon around, with even more vigour than normal, so much so that when the girls pushed in to Leon he dropped the bag he was holding for Mrs W and her cigarette holder fell out, so Leon took his boxing glove off very quickly and popped it back in the bag, put his glove back on and carried on just in time to hand Mrs W the bag back so she could then take out her cigarette holder in the next bit. Grandma's song was beautifully done and when Ann Emery started madly dancing it looked like genuine laughter on Leon's face. Solidarity was perfectly viewed from my seat in row F (I saw it from row B on Tues and you miss the whole picture from that close up). Leon was great in the toilet scene I loved his face as Mrs W opened the door and he said "you can't come in her". As soon as Billy started to call Michael I knew it was here, the last time that bedroom would be pulled out and there would be Joey in his skirt. I'm sure this must have been a really hard scene for Joey to do, he was obviously feeling emotional but somehow managed to put that to one side and give an outstanding performance, he gave Leon a huge liptick smile and Leon's face was a picture as he stood there and could feel that Joey was going to town on his face, I felt really sad when Joey said that final "time to look in the mirror" and Leon did spend a long time looking in the mirror to assess the damage. The Leon/Joey combination for Express Yourself can only be described as dynamite, they obviously had a ball performing this number together for the last time and by the end of the song when just Joey is left on stage we were on our feet to show Joey our huge appreciation. David Bardsley and Chris Lennon gave us the emotionally charged confrontation scene, I love the way Chris delivers the "you've been a waste of space since mam died" line. The Letter, I felt was particularly poignant tonight, I love the way Leon always brushes his face with his hand as Mrs W first starts to read the letter, and Leon did this scene with more emotion than I have seen from him before, with a beautiful look at his mum as she appeared and his eyes were definitely glistening with tears. Mr Braithwaite received huge applause for his efforts in Born to Boogie and when Mrs W said "come on join in" Leon certainly did that with that lovely ease of dancing that he has and that lovely grin. Emma gave an outstanding performance as Debbie in the toilet scene, she really took her time on each line as she said it and her facial expressions were great. Mrs W was then on to fasten Billy's coat and give him that lovely 'swaying cuddle'. Leon's angry dance was riveting - the angry dance I feel is always a very different dance depending on which Billy you see, although they all do the same dance each boy seems to have their own interpretation and last night I loved Leon's especially at the beginning when Billy is still up by his bed and you could really see the anger on Leon's face.

Act 2

Merry Xmas Maggie T was a lovely upbeat way to start the second half, its always great to clap along to this bit and join in. Joey (wearing a Maggie T mask) sat at the side of the stage with Emma and one of the ballet girls and all three of them did the 'arm wave' thing in time with the puppets. Joey then thoroughly enjoyed getting "Cindy the Nurse" out of his coat for one last time and it was beautifully done when Leon and Joey stood together while Michael warmed Billy's hands and then delivered that little kiss. Joey did a wonderful job of putting on that tutu before standing to "look beautiful". When Leon told him how to have nice soft hands - Joey did a great face with a brilliant finger wiggle after Leon had stroked his hand and it was really touching and I'm quite sure that when Joey went out of that door at the back of the stage in his tutu he must have dissolved into tears Swan Lake was superbly done by Leon and Isaac and as Leon spun round and round up high he allowed himself a huge smile before putting on his straight face again for his descent. In the audition scene Leon had a particularly tricky tape but he didn't give up and he finally 'got it back in' (don't know if I was the only one who wanted to stand and cheer at this point). Leon's Electricity was perfect in every way - I'm sure I haven't seen that flip before! When Billy went to say goodbye to Mrs W we were treated to a magic moment when Debbie ran towards Billy, as Mrs W told her to go instead of running off as normal she went over to Leon leaned up and gave him a gentle kiss on the cheek It was then time for Billy/Leon to say his goodbye to Mrs W which was as emotional and heartfelt as we knew it would be with Hadyn leaving the stage visibly in real tears. When Once We Were Kings started I could feel the emotion building - I think it's that suitcase and that run up and hug that Billy gives Dad. The Letter reprise was just outstanding, Stephanie Putson was visibly moved and Leon's emotion was written all over his face and his voice was faltering as soon as he started to sing and he sang his reply beautifully through his tears, I have never witnessed such an emotionally charged scene and I was struggling to hold it together myself as Leon said his farewell and climbed down from the stage. Then the sight of Joey on that bike and that was it I had tears streaming down my face as Leon went back on stage to give Michael a kiss, but not only did he give him a kiss but a huge hug too and then it was our last chance to see Joey on that bike before the curtain finally came down. If ever we needed a finale to lift our spirits, tonight was the night and we were treated to a wonderful finale beautifully led by Leon who tonight had given a truly magnificent performance as Billy Leon ensured that Emma and Joey were there at the front to receive applause with him, and by this point there were lots of people on stage in tears. The curtain went down and came up again so that Leon could stand there alone and receive the applause he so deserved. Our final treat was for James, Liam, Colin, Travis and Matthew to run on stage with bouquets for all those leaving and then the curtain came down for the final time.

It was such a memorable evening, and I can't remember ever feeling so emotional. Thank you everyone for such a fantastic show but special thanks to Leon, Joey and Emma

After the show we were lucky enough to see Joey at the stage door and my daughter Lucy had her photo taken with him - he looked so smart in his suit and was a real gentleman who took time to sign and pose for pictures with everyone who wanted them. I must say it was a relief to see a Smiley Joey again, and when all the signing/pictures were done it was a smiling Joey who went off down the street to the cheers of those of us who were still there. Thank you Joey - what a star!

Helen

I have so much to say but don't know where to start.

Wow, what an amazing night!

What lovely words from Stephen Daldry at the start, particularly for Emma.

As the Tom got up onto the stage and the video began I was so excited and emotional and when the singing began I got the same tingle that I felt the first time I saw the show. It was great when Haydn entered the stage and got a huge applause immediately. The ballet girls looked like they were having great fun during Shine. Grandma's song was performed brilliantly and Leon looked so amused when Ann started dancing, she as always was fantastic. Solidarity was brilliant to watch, again the whole cast were great and the ballet girls were really enjoying themselves. I got very emotional just before the start of expressing yourself knowing that it would be Joey's last time performing it. He took full advantage of this, smothering Leon in lipstick (Leon seemed quite shocked by this, the look on his face even from the GC was priceless!) Both boys really gave it their all and the connection between them was amazing. They looked like they were having such a good time. The letter scene got to me as usual but even more so seeing as it was Stephanie's last night. Born to Boogie was performed perfectly by all three of them. I was really looking forward to angry dance because I loved this when I first saw it and couldn't wait to see it again. Leon did not disappoint and especially at the start seemed so angry.

Act 2 got off to a good start with a great performance of Merry Xmas Maggie T from all the cast. Deep into the Ground was also a good performance. The winter scene between Leon on Joey was very emotional and funny at the same time. Joey was great with his Cindy the nurse line and 'nice soft hands' bit. He could be a star was great. The audition scene was very well performed by everyone. Leon seemed to have a bit of trouble winding up the tape but was very persistent and got there in the end. Electricity was just spectacular. Leon's singing and dancing was absolutely spot on and his new flip at the end was really amazing! His pirouettes and fouettes were also fantastic, better than I've ever seen him do before and it reminded me of what I've seen of Liam in video clips. The goodbye scene with Mrs W was very heartfelt and emotional, this is when I began to get teary eyed. Once we were Kings was very effective as usual. During the letter reprise both Leon and Stephanie seemed very choked which showed through there singing and was so sad to watch, the tears came even more at this point and then with the goodbye between Billy and Michael I properly began to cry, both boys didn't seem to want to leave each other and when Joey was left onstage crying at the end it was devastating. The finale was good but it was sad to know that this would be the last time we'd have lots of those cast members onstage. It was lovely when the rest of the Billys came on with the flowers at the end.

The audience were very appreciative of all the cast and gave them appropriate applause throughout the show. I realise that I haven't said much about Emma but she performed brilliantly. The whole cast were fantastic and it was such a special night. I hope that the cast that have left will always have great memories of the show, they've given us so much with every performance and for that I would like to thank them.

It was great to meet so many of you for the first time. Thank you so much Helen for selling me the tickets, I'm so glad I got to see the show.

I bumped into James at the interval and he said he liked my tutu which was rather exciting and I thanked him for that. It was such a shame that George wasn't there.

Went to the stage door afterwards. It was very busy so I didn't get to talk properly with the cast but they were very friendly and I got some great photos, a lovely one of Joey with his gorgeous smile, I was so pleased that he appeared happy and smiling at the stage door. I was standing next to Liam and Leon's mums at the stage door and they seemed lovely too. It was great to see Liam and Colin at the stage door as well as Leon and Joey.

It was such a great night and I am so glad I was there. Thank you to everyone that made it so special

Jess

It was my first Leon time. Now I know what I missed.

What an impressive Electricity The flip at the end was brilliant, his voice was EXCELLENT from the beginning to the final. Leon is not one of the original Billys but he could easily be considered as one of them.

And Joey ... oh Joey. That lipstick thing was the most brilliant joke ever ! Still laughing at it ! He's got his own mimics, and there are all priceless ! Expressing yourself was then the funniest I've ever seen, and what an ovation at the end !

I appreciated the hug between Joey and Leon at the end and the kiss from Emma to Leon as a goodbye as well as the big cheer when Haydn entered for his last "Shine".

Remi

Both performances yesterday were superb. Very emotional but very good.

The star of the day for me had to be little Emma. She was clearly very sad right from the opening of the show but she gave one of the best Debbie performances I have seen to date.

She gave a classic "Mam we've run out of jaffa cakes!" during the snow scene with Mrs W and Dad (Just before Haydn replies "Bugger off Debbie I'm busy!").

And her kiss to Leon was the bit that brought the lump to my throat. Then seeing her cry her way through the finale had me struggling to keep back my own tears.

All the Billys came on at the end to present the cast leavers with flowers and James Lomas came on to present Emma with her flowers and a huge hug. (although he couldn't seem to find her at first!!)

The other moment that choked me up was Leon hugging Joey in the final scene. Knowing it was their last time up there after the journey they've taken together in BETM, it really was a goodbye between best friends.

That and Stephanie crying through her final lines in The Letter Reprise.

Having missed the gala night I really enjoyed being in the audience alongside numerous cast members and their family for the first time. The atmosphere was fantastic, although the whole evening was bittersweet and there were many tears both on stage and in the audience.

It was nice to see James Lomas back at the theatre running about all over the place and clearly loving any attention aimed in his direction. He was a pleasure to speak to briefly in the interval and I gave him Haydn's leaving card from the forum which he was only too happy to take backstage and pass on to her.

It was great to meet so many forum members too and catch up with those I've met before. Still can't believe you persuaded me to put my tutu on Lin!!! I didn't actually notice any strange looks but I did leave glitter everywhere I went (including all over James and his mum's seats when I was speaking to Linda, who was sat next to them, during the interval. I did apologise to them though and I think they were rather bemused by my tutu!!)

I really enjoyed myself last night but I feel sad today, knowing that I will never see Haydn, Stephanie, Joey, Emma, and all those fantastic ballet girls in BETM again.

Here's to all of you - thanks for everything and best wishes for the future.

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Kryslet81

This surpassed all of my expectations and for me succeeded May 12th. Everyone has done a great job so I thought I would pick out some of the highlights for me:

Tom Higgins' was hilarious from the front of the stalls after George had told him off in the boxing scene 'Jesus christ'.. He just started mouthing silently to himself. I have never sat that far forward and thought it was soo funny.

Two ballet girls really stood out for me as well - the girl playing Tracey Atkinson was a delight to watch, as was the girl wearing a pink and grey striped top (she was generally at the right of the stage) don't know her characters name but she was spot on.

From so far forward you really do get to see a lot more detail in performance - Michael Greenhill for example - cautiously eyeing up Billy at the start of the audition scene.

The rest of the cast put in fantastic performances, moving me to tears in He Could be A Star . I really felt the whole show was just so vibrant last night - it enthused energy and fun - especially the larger ensemble pieces. I really like the understudy Dad, as I have now seen him more than Philip Whitchurch, and there is just something about his performance that is spot on.

As for Joey - well. I'm speechless. His performance was first rate and I really will miss my 'favourite' Michael. The gusto he used in Expressing Yourself thoroughly deserved the standing ovation. I laughed my head off at the lipstick scenario and his timing was fabulous; I too got a lump in my throat at the final 'Time to look in the mirrrrr' The whole routine was perfectly executed and I really felt for him. He also looked deflated during 'Deep Into the Ground' and you really got the impression he knew his run was coming to the end.

The Christmas scene was touching with Leon and Joey's unbeatable pathos and Joey revelled in his final performance making himself look 'beautiful'.

I was really touched to see Leon and Joey hug in the Wings during the Finale and the stage hands congratulate Joey in the scene after the audition. He held it together well but did look heartbroken in the 'See ya Billy' scene and the Finale. I think this was genuine but yet that famous smile shone through. Mr Phillips may have gone, but the smile lives on.

Michael Fan

Stephen Daldry gave a really moving speech about all the cast members who were leaving, and how the majority of them were responsible for the shows success because they created some of the roles. He mentioned all the names separately...each getting applause from the forum! Finally he came to Haydn (and for me) what he said seemed harder for him to say as though he was trying not to cry. (anyone else notice this?)

Act 1

Even before the curtain went up i knew this was going to be a special performance and when the small boy came onto the stage i knew the evening had only just begun and there was going to be many great moments.

They just missed having problems with the curtain that falls down at the beginning, it got caught on the top part of the left hand side of the set, It stayed there for a few moments....but i was soo relieved that they managed to unhook it without many people noticing! As far as i noticed this was the only 'mistake' in the only production (i'm probably wrong though!).

I must say here this was my first time seeing Leon and also my first (and last) time seeing Joey too.

The Stars Look Down - By this early stage in the musical i was already taken in by all the action! Honestly i can't remember much about it...the cast all sang well and strongly though...the start to what was an amazing evening.

In Billys House i was quite surprised to see David Bardsley running down the stairs playing the dad...which makes me wonder where was phillip? Anyway i found he was less funny in this scene. However i must say that he did a wonderful job at playing the dad for both performances this day, especially considering the amount of pressure he was under. Well done David!

The Boxing lesson was soo funny and as soon as Joey walked on stage you knew this performance was going to be very emotionally hard for him. Having never seen him before, i didn't know what to expect. He was very funny in this scene and it was obvious that he had been working with Leon many times before.

Then came, for me, the most awaited part of the evening...Haydn's final 1st entrance. She met loads of applause and it was soo emotional. She truly deserved it though! I was very impressed at how she managed to stay in character and continue with the action on stage, despite the amazing reception mainly given by fans from the forum! I must say she was 'on fire' at this performance. As this was her last performance you can tell she was enjoying every moment at being able to play Mrs Wilkinson one last time. I'd forgotten just how good some of her one-liners are in this scene. I loved (and will always remember) how she said 'Music Maestro please..' in this performance. It was just soo funny!

Shine- I thought it was quite funny seeing how many costume changes Haydn actually makes in this scene (nnever noticed that before!). It was not only a sentimental experience for her but also some of the ballet girls who were saying goodbye too!

Ann Emery was astounding last night. She was really going mental in 'We'd Go Dancing', its was actually quite scary the amount of ebergy she had. Maybe she did it in tribute to the people who were leaving? I couldn't stop laughing at one point when she was dancing around the stage with her dressing gown! She certainly got the repsonse and applause she deserved! I don't know whether it was just me...or did she keep going on about the pasty more than she does normally?!

Solidarity is a great song normally, but i felt there was something special about this time. Again i did find it odd seeing David and not Phillip as the dad! I love in this scene how they alternate between the ballet and the miners. Its great when the dad says 'Where the bloody hell has in been goin' and you see Billy dancing in the background! I really liked Leon's performance because he didn't just pick up the skill of dancing quickly. The audience could see his frustration as he attempted to learn the moves and the gradual transition for me was very effective! I've always liked it when everything goes silent and Billy is in that position (name?!) and Mrs Wilkinson comes up to him and makes minor adjustments until his position is perfect. Last night the atmosphere in the theatre was incredibly tense and nobody made a single noise during this speical moment.

Seeing Joey in that dress was incredibly funny. Having only seen Brad before i didn't know what Joey was going to be like..he was very different but again just as funny. The best part for me was when he put the lipstick on Leon: he put soo much on him and kinda made two fangs with loads on his lips too. And then came his famous 'Time to look in the mirror' line! This bit was great as you could see Leon looking at the lipstick on his face and laughing to himself; i'm sure his got his own back later!

Expressing Yourself was very funny, not only because it was Joey's last time either. This scene showed just how strong a team Leon and Joey are. They knew eachothers moves soo well...and had soo much fun in this scene that the audience responded by laughing loads! I love Joey's flashing the audience before he goes offstage...this really is a joey-ism! I'm very surprised Joey got through this scene as i was sure he was going to either start lauging or crying in soo many places!

Poor Stephanie Putson was clearly upset. In my opinion this made her performance even more effective. The letter scene was heartbreaking because you had both Haydn and Stephanie singing to Billy for the last time in this scene. The line 'proud to have known you' seemed to have its own poignancy too.

In Born To Boogie Leon, Haydn and Alex were amazing! This scene is soo funny..and also reminds the audience how good a dancer Haydn actaally is! This is the transition for Billy developing his dancing skills and techniques. Alex as Mr Braithwaite did the splits really slowly and acted as though it was really painful. You have to laugh when he does that! This scene also showed Haydn's range as a singer especially the glissando to that really high note near the end of the song.

Continued...

The scene where Billy misses his audition and Mrs Wilkinson enters is another favourite part of mine. Mrs Wilkinson almost pleads them to 'give the boy a chance' and only really effects the dad who later changes from this scene. The dry tone in Haydn's voice really represented her feelings and her hatred of Tony. I always think she is going to slap him in this scene..dunno why! The long pause before she whispers 'sorry billy, i tried' and then walks slowly off stage was heartbreaking.

The angry dance was done very well by Leon...who looked to me like he couldn't get angry that easily! There was lots of shouting and Leon showed the frustration really well. The line 'dance you little bas****' is highlighted here as Billy literally dances until he tires himself out! I really admire both Liam and Leon here for performing this very strenuous dance considering the temperature yesterday and the heat in the auditorium. Anyway this really ended a fantastic act 1. But of course there was more to come!

Act 2

The riotous 'Merry Christmas Maggie Thatcher' is a great ensemble piece which has nearly all the cast onstage. There was lots of clapping from the audience too....which makes it even more fun!

Deep into the ground is a very moving song which David sang very softly as though every word was penetrating his sometimes painful memories. In places i t persoanlly didn't like his voice in this song and i was less moved than when i saw Phillip (as when he does it the sobbing really effects me!) but the message was still just as powerful.

I really enjoyed Joeys 'Cindy the nurse' that was very funny and the delight on his face when he was told he could not only put on the tutu but keep it aswell! It was funny also when Leon stroked Joey's hand and he said 'Do the same to the other one' a great line..haven't heard it before!

He Could Be A Star was amazing. Both Chris and David worked well together. This song shows how both of them change their opinions and i really felt they were torn here between their union commitements and the welfare of Billy.

The audition for the Royal Ballet School is always funny...i was a bit worried that Leon was going to have problems with the tape, luckily though he managed to wind it all in but it took a while! (well done Leon if that was me i'd have been panicking!) The scene when Jackie is outside with the ballet dancer is great! I loved Davids touch about the cigarette..firstly going to put it out on the curtain, then the floor and finally giving it to the woman!

Electricity is always an amazing experience. It must have been really hard for Leon knowing he was to play Billy in the last performance before some of the original cast members leave. Adding to his pressure to , I can imagine, was all the current Billys and James in the audience too! Leon delivered a stunning performance showing exceptional skill as a ballet dancer and also in contemporary dance. There must have been many cast members too watching Leon perform this from the wings, seeing it performed one last time. Leon delivered an amazing tribute to the cast leavers and a memorable night for everyone.

Haydn's final exit still sends shivers up my spine now thinking of it! Not only did she get loads of applause when she made her final 1st apearence but the amount of the applause she got when she left was at least 10 times more! She clearly effected many people with her interpretation and clearly will be remembered for the woman who created Mrs Wilkinson on stage, and probabaly the standard too. Haydn was crying too and was definatly in tears when she made her final exit and only just managed to say her final line...makes me want to cry too.

The final letter scene was heartbreaking, especially for Stephanie who was crying: it made her final performance even more memorable. I'm surprised she managed to get through the singing. Leon looked to me like he was crying too. Stephanie's final exit.

The very final scene when Billy walks down the centre of the stalls and Michael is on stage i will always remember. Leon, after kissing Joey, walked very slowly through the stalls. Joey sat motionless on his bike and the curtain lowered cery slowly. Joey was very emotional and was clearly crying because this was his final goodbye to the part of Michael. The ending to a very memorable and amazing evening!

Just to say...well done to anyone who has managed to read this without dying of boredom (its taken me ages to write! the computer crashed at one point!)

Just quickly to say that at the stage door Haydn was met with such a welcome responce from the forum members that i'm sure she won't forget it for a very long time! Lets wish her all the best in the future. Finally, i asked Joey how he was feeling and he said that he was sad but also excited about doing something new.

It's difficult to know what to write after such an emotional evening and to compound matters there's a definite sense of anti-climax about today. The whole show was just too emotional and the cast really did themselves proud. Leon was superb and I especially enjoyed his Act II. His Electricity really sparked last night. It was sharp and edgy but managed to retain its structure, and there's something really 'cool' about the way he performs that routine, full of energy and life. There's an earthiness to his ballet that I find immensely appealing, and the addition of the backflip before his spins was breath-takingly executed.

The ballet girls of Littleton, many of whom were leaving, were simply spectacular. So funny and cute. Michael Greenhill and Tom Higgins did themselves proud - Tom's mouthing in the boxing scene was uber-amusing. Emma Hudson as Debbie will be missed. Her impeccable timing, and her ability to bring out the humorous nature of her lines were very much in evidence yesterday evening, even though she was clearly very tearful. The proffered cheek to Leon, and the quick peck was amusing and heart-warming at the same time, and as she is James's original Debbie it was great that he got the opportunity to present her with her leaver's bouquet at the end, though he had some difficulty picking her out! Joey Phillips - well what can one say about him that hasn't been said before. His consummate professionalism and tremendous acting talent will stand him in good stead for a future career in the performing arts. A really quite touching Expressing Yourself, with liberal application of the lipstick followed by a well-deserved standing ovation shows just what a crowd-pleaser his Michael is. The special chemistry he shared with Leon will be difficult to replicate, and the hug at the final goodbye was very emotional.

Stephanie Putson gave a tremendously moving performance as Dead Mum. She manages to bring such warmth to the role and she really gives her all to the Billy. Her gentle smile and her sweet singing voice really brought so much to her small part, and she really is such a natural. Her wobbling voice and her tears at the end says it all really. She has invested so much of her self into the character, and the emotion she conveyed last night in answer to Billy's question, "See you soon?" - "No, I don't think so" was genuine.

I've saved my final comments for the incomparable Haydn Gwynne. As Stephen Daldry said in his opening remarks - "she is the rock on which this production is built." I can only concur with him. Her rock-solid performances, day in day out, and her stage presence and charisma provided stability to a changing cast. Her vigour, vibrancy and tremendous singing, acting and dancing talent captured the imagination and her caustic portrayal though different from Julie Walters in the film was just as effective - managing to balance both world-weariness yet always staying fresh. She really was the unfulfilled dance teacher in Easington and for me she has also come to represent not just Billy's but James, George, Liam, Leon, Travis, Matt and Colin's dance teacher as well - so much did she own the role. She will be sorely missed, not just on-stage, but her good humour and excellent fan rapport off-stage will always be remembered.

Good luck and goodbye - Haydn, Stephanie, Joey, Emma, Tom, Michael, Littleton. Thanks for the memories!

JW

I would just like to say that as the parent of one of the original ballet girls that performed last night (Biancha) many thanks for all your wonderful comments regarding the girls (and indeed the whole of the show) i have only posted once before to give my thanks, preferring just to check the forum for photos etc - but i feel that i must thank all the fans for the lovely comments that we have read following the shows, especially the ones my daughter has performed in since the start (inc 3rd june and gala night 12th may) and for the great photos on the site (anyone got photos from tonight ?)

It will be hard for her to leave everybody as she first started with company in pre-rehearsal workshops back in nov 2004!!! but what a night to finish on!!!!!!

I was quite composed until she started singing in the opening, sung in the xmas scene, oh and said her 'did you really get in' line ... oh and the finale tap (she is the taller of the 2 girls that start tapping straight after Leon) - ok so i shed a little tear at each scene but so what!!

My daughter has enjoyed every moment of the show, and as parents we have nothing but praise for the cast, crew and chaperones for the care, attention and huge amount of fun received. I hope all you 'die hard fans' enjoy the show for many years to come.

we shall be back to watch on mon 12th june to see a close friend of ours who begins her first performance next week as a ballet girl.

I dont think we left the stage door till soooo late yesterday as i couldnt get Biancha away but i think she was enjoying every last moment., but why not, experiences like this dont come around that often. Good luck and goodbye - Haydn, Stephanie, Joey, Emma, Tom, Michael, Littleton. Thanks for the memories!

fingers_crossed

Oh my god..when i now think about the evening performance i really have to be strong not to start to cry again!!!what a perfect performance from all of the cast!!leon was just much better than the last time i`ve seen him and his ballet is just stunning!!!!!!!

joey.....

he is soooooooooo special!!!in expressing yourself you could really see how much fun he has together with leon and how he enjoyed putting the lipstick on leons lips!i will never forget this smile!!!

leons angry dance was fab as well and at the very end me and my friend svenja were the lucky persons leon threw the balletshoes at...but i didn` t dare keeping them...should i have???

i really hated the end of the show as i just didn` t want it to finish!!!!!!

Nicola

As I was just reading all the reviews from yesterday I had to be very strong not to cry(I live in a hostel where people pass the computer all the time)

As some of you realized I haven't wrote reviews for ages.I can't express myself like the native english speakers I lost the confidence to write anymore but now I can't stop it.

Well loads of things were already written so appologise if you will read the same things.

First, about Stephen Daldry's speech I don't remember he mentioned Tom Higgins's name but I'm sure he wanted just was too sad and confused.

when he left the stage and the show began I was already crying...thx for Linda who saved me to give me some hankies

It is always so sad when cast members leave a show but yesterday was totally different then another times(I've seen some other last shows)because we have seen that particular show so many times so many of us... listening Joey's brilliant"time to look at the miiiiror" Emma's If you want I'll show you me...Stephanie's beautiful singing voice Tom Higgins's w****er the wonderful ballet girls and Hayden's Mrs Wilkinson....and knowing during sitting there with full of thears that this is the last time to see them in Billy Eliot...is very sad

Doesn't matter how many times have you seen BETM yesterday's show was a very different one.

As it was mention Leon must had big pression on him to perform knowing it's a very special night and he has to be very good.(but Leon is always very good)he did a fantastic performance!!!

Expressing Yourself was funny and touching too.the audience went hysterical when Joey put the lipstick on Leon's face,this pair worked together since they began to play and you could feel it! they were just brilliant all the time!!!I don't know should I mention but they were my favourite Billy-Michael pair.

I will miss Emma so much too.I've seen her Debby's the most.It was very nice to Phil who put his hand to Emma's shoulder(when the stars look down) and if you were sitting the front stalls you could see Phil stroke her too.Emma was perfect yesterday.and she make me cry (again)when at the Goodbye scene she runed to Leon and give him a peck.all the audience gave a very loud ohhhhh.

Everything what I wanted to tell about Hayden was already written.Hayden i'll miss you too!!!

I have to tell that my favourite ballet girls group was always the Littleton- group.and i'm so glad that some of them can stay!!!they deserve a big respect they also work so hard and without them there wont be BETM!!!!thank you girls for the many brilliant shows what you gave us.and I wish all of you very good luck in the future and some of you who could stay see you soon!!!

Leon you did a fantastic show yesterday.Thank you so much for the backlip!!!!I can't believe finally I could see it!!I really wanted to stand up after Leon's Electricity.He was absolutely on fire!why didn't we stand up?that is the only one thing what I really regret...I never remember Leon got this huge applause after Electricity imagine if we stand up for him!!!

the other thing about Leon I've never seen him crying but yesterday he couldn't control himself at the letter reprise.yes everybody who's not sure about it Leon was crying.I remember how he did choked then how Stephanie was singing and crying too.this was the time when I also (and so many of us)began to actually cry.I could here so many people were sobbing.when Leon climbed down from the stage he was just in front of me(I got B15)and he was crying then came Joey with his bicycle and the another half of the audience who could held their tears before, now they couldn't hold it anymore(I think)this hug wasn't acting it wasn't to say goodbye between Billy-Michael no it was between Leon and Joey!!!

It was a very good idea to give the leaving cast members flowers by the current Billys and James Lomas.the only thing is I thought they will spend more time on stage.I expect more dance or something .when the curtain came down the last time I was hoping it would be go up again...

oh I'm sorry my review it's a bit long I was trying not to write too much.

I left so many thing what I still wanted to tell.

JN

Saturday night was exceptional for me for many reasons. It was lovely for me to be going with a very old friend, but this sadly meant I didn't get to chat with many of the forum which was a shame. Whoever it was wearing that lovely purple tutu with sequins who was immediately behind me as we made our way back to our seats at the end of the interval- you looked wonderful!

This was probably one of the strongest all-round performances I've seen. The finale in particular was fan-bloody-tastic, with an intensity from everyone that was incredible. This was the first time I'd seen David Bardsley and I have to disagree with Martin- my initial impression is that he's my least favourite Dad. It was the first time I'd seen Leon and Joey since November. It was a treat to see how much they've both developed since then in every way. This is particularly marked in Joey's case and Mr Daldry's remark about hurtling towards adolescence was true- he has changed physically out of all recognition in 7 months! I'm glad I got to hear the famous 'mirrooor' delivery at last. It was even more, er, exceptional than I had imagined! I thought Express would be good but it was REALLY excellent. We needn't have worried about giving Joey an ovation- the row of Billys, Michaels and Debbies four rows in front of me were on their feet in an instant! It was so great to see them all turning out to give their friends a send-off. It was obvious that they all really care for each other. (If anyone was wondering who shouted "Yes!" in answer to Paul Broughton's "Are we down hearted?" it was them)

Emma was brilliant last night too. The way she milked the lines in the toilet scene was the best I've seen it done. The little peck she gave Leon as he made her final exit was really affecting.

I won't add anything about the other leavers as it's all been said better than I can do it. But I must just mention that The Letter reprise had me and my friend in floods. There were audible sobs coming from somewhere near me too!

One last thing. The tiaras that the ballet girls wear at the end of Shine seemed to be bigger and camper than in the past! Was it just me? And Stephen Daldry's speeches- they're always so perfectly pitched, aren't they?

srd17

For those who wondered about the name of the office block it is actually Elliot house! This has probably been mentioned elsewhere but I noticed it for the first time last night.

I was really pleased that it was Leon performing it was good for him to have a special show as joining later he has seemed to miss out a bit in the attention the original 3 got. I was pleased for another reason I had only seen the original 3 Billy's this is between Sep and now 10 viewings. Leon was one I was very keen to see also Joey as I have mainly seen Brad. I wasn't a bit disappointed.

Emma the first time I had seen her, I really enjoyed her interpretation of Debbie a more mature Debbie I felt than either Brooke or Lucy. Despite being very emotional from the start she maintained her character very well. She didn't rush her lines and was very clear. I loved the way she spent ages during the Christmas party trying to open her present urged on I might add by her on stage companions. I loved the extra peck on the cheek when she said goodbye to Leon.

Joey what can I say that smile which was there nearly all the time. I loved his skirt in express yourself he really made rather a sweet little girl! His outfit wasn't as hideous as Brad's dress. Express yourself was just such fun to watch. You could really sense just how well the two boys got on and what a ball they were having. For working well together as a team and bouncing of each other it reminded me of the George and Brad partnership. I loved the contrast between express yourself and the winter scene, which was really well done. There were understandably tears at the end but he was very quickly over them and back to his smiley self in the finale. From where I was sitting I could see him dancing away in the wings. When Leon came of stage they gave each other a cuddle in the wings whilst waiting to go on.

Leon was just as I had hoped I wasn't in the least bit disappointed. I loved his dancing especially his ballet he was so fast and strong. His Billy was different again a very cool and laid back and well adjusted. Only very rarely showing glimpse of anger then very quickly over them. A sensible and mature Billy who seems to be coping as well as he could with the situation he is in and what life has thrown to him. Maybe the only person who his Billy could really open out to was Michael and gradually Mrs Wilkinson. Loved the embrace with her it was a real boy just seeking some comfort. I thought his angry dance was really good. Loved the ending back flip to Electricity not sure if I have seen that tucked back flip before. Loved the way he peered into the mirror and the look and giggle when he saw what Joey had done to him. I think he had a bit of difficulty emotionally in getting through a few of the sad scenes. He held himself together very well emotionally. Even at the end during the letter reprise when clearly he was overcome with emotion he managed to get through that song. You could see that when he was facing the back of the stage he was trying very hard to wipe the tears away this made it all the more poignant. Loved the hug to Joey after the goodbye kiss. It must have been a very lonely walk up the aisle for him. Like Joey he very quickly became the smiley Leon again and really enjoyed the finale.

A few other thoughts great as both Phil and David are I still love Tim's deep into the ground. I always found that so moving. Anne Emery was as great as ever she really seems to relish the part and has such fun. She appears to have such a good relationship with the boys. Just like a special Grandma really.

I was really sorry to see Haydn go she is such a great Mrs Wilkinson caustic but with a real heart of gold. Loved the way she gave the boys the cuddle she seemed to give a slightly different cuddle for each boy. Definitely on Dec 3rd she was cuddling a boy who was really upset about his term as Billy coming to an end.

I still don't like the new end to the audition scene. Think the bear hug is special to Billy and his Dad. Loved it when the posh boy just glared at his and said "just you fucking wait." Felt this was the sort of response you would have got in that sort of situation.

Great evening would have been nice to have seen a nice goodbye on stage from the cast to Haydn and Joey and Emma. But maybe they didn't want it. Shame George and Phil weren't there but am sure that they had very good reasons.

Great evening possibly not quite as emotional as 3rd December but then that was very emotional.

Great to meet so many members of the forum. Hope to meet you all again soon. Will probably try and stick to finishing nights now as can't afford to keep on going. Please post as soon as we know for definite when people are leaving and they are happy for it to be announced.

What an absolutely unforgettable show. It was almost flawless in every way - every actor was on top of his or her game and the result was a show that left me in floods of tears multiple times.

First, I have to comment on Leon's performance. He was absolutely incredible last night - I've seen him 4 times before, but I've never seen him like this. His singing was pure and tuneful, his acting was engaging, realistic and sympathetic, and his dancing was...well, beyond words. Electricity stands out for me as one of the highlights of an evening of highlights - I was so completely blown away that I literally forgot to breathe until my lungs started protesting. Leon's acting, with the protracted, thoughtful pauses in between the first few lines, was especially poignant, and the play of emotions across his face as he tried to convey the depth of Billy's love for dancing was wonderful to see. As for the dancing itself, Leon's powerful grace never fails to amaze me, and the added aerial flip to his tumbling run had the audience cheering long before he had even started into those beautiful pirouettes that end the number. The flip took me completely by surprise and I have to confess I let out a spontaneous whoop and started clapping before I even knew what I was doing. It was absolutely phenomenal. The result was the most extended applause I've ever experienced at the show, with Leon frozen in his ending position for what seemed like forever. Swan Lake was beautiful as well - I always love watching Leon and Isaac together and, although they weren't always perfectly in sync last night, when they were it was magical. Everyone always comments on how stunning Liam's ballet is, but I think Leon should be acknowledged as well. There's a raw grace to his ballet technique that's in sharp contrast to Liam's softer floatiness (for lack of a better word) - Leon's exudes masculinity while Liam's is the epitome of beauty. I don't think anyone, however, can beat Leon at the speed with which he spins through his fouettes and pirouettes.

Leon seemed determined to throw body and soul into the show yesterday and, consequently, everything he did had a little extra kick. His acting was extraordinary - it was wonderfully nuanced and characterized by the best expressions. For example, in the acceptance letter scene, Leon walked to the counter, turned, saw his family looking at him, gave them a "what the hell?" expression, followed their eyes as they looked down, let an expression of realization dawn across his face, then quickly replaced that with apprehension. He also added touches that enhanced his performance - I think Leon has a real gift for comedy. In the same scene, after the "William Elliot is queer" line, he held the letter out to David and pointed to what was presumably the word esquire as if to prove that he had read it right. Brilliant. His dancing was also particularly sharp, with his normally fast spins being executed even more quickly and with more precision. In Expressing Yourself, his high kicks were higher than I had ever seen them, and the little kicks to the side where Billy and Michael click their heels together were particularly energetic and bouncy.

Both boys, in fact, were at their best in Expressing Yourself. Joey had an absolute field day with the lipstick, drawing lines down Leon's cheeks and forehead, and getting it on everything but Leon's lips, which seemed to amuse both of them. The sight of both boys prancing towards the front of the stage, arms linked on one side and swinging on the other, pink robe floating behind and wide silly grins on their faces (Leon's made sillier by the lipstick that decorated his face) will stay in my memory forever. Leon threw in a couple of touches I had never seen before - after Joey said, "It beats bloody boxing!" and smoothed his skirt over his rear, Leon turned so he was also facing away from the audience and copied him, feigning concentration at trying to see how his bum looked in a skirt. The spark that both boys bring to this number was electric last night and, as already mentioned, Joey received a well-earned standing ovation, which he reciprocated with a delighted smile and spirited kisses blown at the audience.

Joey was, unsurprisingly, an absolute star. In terms of general comments, it struck me yesterday that Joey's singing, which isn't often commented on, is so good. His voice doesn't quite have the richness or Brad's, but it's melodious and he has great control. Joey is also such an outstanding dancer and extremely well-matched with Leon. The sheer exuberance with which they dance together and the way they match their styles to each other is brilliant. Finally, Joey's acting is fantastic. He has amazing expressions - you can really see the progress of emotions and thoughts on his face, and he knows exactly how to convey the emotion he wants to simply through the expressions on his face. His deservedly beloved smile was in constant attendance, and the wicked gleam in his eye as he grinned at Leon after hitting George in the boxing scene made me grin. All the added touches that make Joey's Michael unique were startlingly clear - his "time to look in the mirroooooor!" and the way he wiggles his way into his tutu in the Winter Scene, along with his shimmies through Expressing Yourself and his flashing of the audience, among others. Despite all his outrageousness and smiles, however, the truly endearing thing about Joey last night was the tenderness with which he interacted with Leon. His, "well, I'd miss ya" in the Winter Scene was so gently and vulnerably delivered, and the sobs with which he watched Leon walk away from him at the end were all too real. At the curtain call, it was heart-wrenching to see Joey in tears, and the sight of his usually cheerful face crumpled into an expression of grief was almost too much to bear.

Emma was also brilliant last night. She threw herself completely into the role, milking every line she had and making sure that each moment she was on stage counted. Her tearful face in Stars Look Down was the first indicator for me that the show was going to be an emotional roller coaster, and the sight of her in the Finale, laughing through her tears, was difficult to watch. Emma has always been such a fantastic Debbie, and she really showed it last night. Every line was clear, every expression in line with her character, every ad lib perfect for the moment, and every pause just right for the occasion. I'm really going to miss her.

There were, overall, plenty of sad and touching moments to bring on the tears. Leon's, "it's nearly time for the big finish" followed by a quieter, "a REALLY big finish", and Joey's, "one last time" as he and Leon launched into the dance with the dresses in Expressing Yourself brought tears to my eyes, as did the spontaneous kiss Emma and Leon exchanged in Emma's last scene. Leon looked surprised for a moment at Emma's proffered cheek, but the kiss he gave her was gentle and sincere. The added hug between Joey and Leon in the farewell also broke my heart, as did the quiet sobs that could be heard from Leon as he jumped off the stage and walked away from his friend for the very last time. The thing that really broke me down, however, was the Letter Reprise. Leon faltered his way through the words, his voice breaking and choked with tears, and Stephanie's reply was equally fragile and broken. When thinking about who would probably be in tears during the show, I had thought that Leon would be able to hold onto his composure in spite of how upset he would be feeling. I'm not really sure why - I suppose it's because he always comes across as being infallibly strong. Seeing him break down, then, was especially heartrending.

Continued...

I obviously can't forget Haydn and Stephanie in this review . Both are so consistently brilliant that I think their performances are often taken for granted, but both will be dearly missed. Haydn was extremely emotional last night. Her tears in the goodbye scene with Leon threatened to choke off her voice, and it took her awhile to compose herself after the first Letter. She was also buoyant, though, and obviously drinking in the experience of her last night. In Born to Boogie, the looks she shared with Leon got me choked up. They grinned widely at each other with sparkling eyes – it was as if the entire last part of the dance was danced solely for each other. The hug between her and Leon was also touching. It was long and drawn out, and the expressions on both their faces made it clear that they were hugging each other as themselves and not their characters.

Stephanie was also, understandably, very emotional. As mentioned before, she fell apart in the Letter Reprise, and her first Letter was particularly gentle. There was an added tenderness and sincerity to her words as she sang them and, as she sang, "Please Billy, know that I will always be proud to have known you", it was clear that she meant the words for Leon. I don't think there will ever be another dead mum like Stephanie – she is truly irreplaceable.

One final mention that can't be left out – Tom Higgins as Small Boy and Michael Greenhill as Tall Boy were fantastic last night, as they always are. I wish they had been mentioned by Stephen Daldry at the beginning of the show because they truly deserve recognition for all they have done. Tom is always a pleasure to watch as he plays his role with such gusto and obvious enjoyment, while Michael is consistently great and is a wonderful actor (I always wince when he goes flying into the safety curtain during the audition scene because it looks so real!). Boys, you will both be missed. Thank you for your performances and please know that we all truly appreciate what you've given to your respective roles. All the best in the future.

Oh, and the ballet girls deserve recognition as well - they were absolutely phenomenal. I especially loved the girl who played Keely Gibson. The way she sticks an entire biscuit in her mouth always makes me laugh, as do all the antics of the ballet girls, in fact. It was sad to see so many of them in tears in the Finale, but brilliant to know that they had the support of so many others in the audience. All of the departing ballet girls will be missed – best of luck in the future girls!

Just a few final notes. The Finale was brilliant – there were a lot of ballet girls and cast members in the audience, so the number began amidst shouts of "go on Leon!" and cheers. I was particularly impressed by the grace with which Leon handled everything and made sure that everyone got their due acknowledgement. He refused to take a bow by himself, instead pulling Joey and Emma up with him so that the three bowed together, hands joined, tears streaming down the faces of both Joey and Emma. He also, when lifted up on his chair at the end, pointed to Joey and made a gesture as if asking the audience to cheer louder for him. The genuine closeness of these two friends was in clear evidence at all times last night . The flowers also seemed to be a genuine surprise for the cast - James ran off in the middle of the finale at some point and I remember Leon looking down at his empty seat, an extremely puzzled look on his face. James did get lost on his way to Emma, but Leon pointed the way . It was difficult to watch the curtain fall on this particular cast for the very last time – I don't think I'll ever forget the sight of Joey and Emma smiling bravely through their tears.

Overall, it was an extremely special night and I'm really glad I was there. It was great fun sitting next to James' mum with James only one seat away because it meant that we could all be extremely vocal together – although I feel like an idiot for not asking James to sign my programme, given how close he was . I've now lost my voice from all the screaming and cheering, but it was well worth it.

Thank you to the entire cast, for the unforgettable performance, and to everyone who was at the show for being part of an amazing audience – the theatre seemed charged with energy, which made the whole experience even more enjoyable . Though I feel a certain emptiness now at the realization that I'll never see Joey, Emma, Stephanie, Haydn, Tom, Michael or this particular group of ballet girls again, I suppose I should just be grateful that I had the extreme pleasure of seeing any of them perform at all. My sincerest thanks for the memories, everyone. You're all "very f***ing special".

jeesun

I was soooooo happy that Leon did the evening performance!

'Expressing yourself' was the most hilarious i have ever seen. my cousin (1st leon performance) and i, and even my dad were crying with laughter. Joey is so natural and just seems to put EVERYTHING into the song.

My mum was so jealous she desperately wanted to go, but she was on the way home from Austria on a coach even though she paid the tickets for us.

For the first time ever swan lake made me cry at the beginning. I don't know why but a tear just rolled down my face . Then 'electricity' was fantastic! It also made me cry for the first time. My jaw just hit the floor after his summie because i wasn't even expecting his backflip let alone that! . When did that get put in? His singing was also great as always!

For the letter my cousin and i were in complete floods for the first time also.

Then when joey came on it set us both off again. The show was so emotional. It was the first one where i did cry.

At the stage door afterwards fay and i congratulated joey and he was really nice. Missed the last train home so was a bit a journey but we were buzzing so that kept us going!

I saw dancervo, zoe and some other forum members in pizza express but didn't get a chance to talk.

Sorry its long and not very good but had to say how brilliant the cast were especially Emma, Joey and Leon, of course.

#1 leon fan

I am not as good as the other reviewers on details. I also notice things that are probably not unique, but here goes.

If ever there was a feature of Leon, after seeing him for the first time, it was a touching sense of generosity. He seemed to craft his splendid dancing, singing and acting to make it a night for the leaving cast. Great performers learn to do this. Their egos give way to their desire for giving the audience and fellow performers something quite special.

Leon emotionally destroyed me in the letter reprise, where I watched his fight for control with my binoculars. Those were real tears and his shoulders shook in harmony with my unsteady attempt to keep him framed. It was so authentic, soft and loving for Leon to speak "Love you forever".

One thing I noticed with Leon's brilliant dancing in Swan Lake and Electricity was the steadiness and balance he achieved. It allowed a smooth, yet vivid interpretation.

Leon has learned to keep the dynamics and contrasts of his singing lines beyond what I expected. The softness of the phrase: "...like a fire deep inside." was haunting in its subtlety.

Hadyn Gwynn seemed to be affected by the sight and sounds of the dancing girls and Leon. There were some appropriate pauses and clear expressions of affection that were appropriate and in keeping with this bittersweet night. Hadyn is bigger than life. She is just grand.

Stephanie Putson allowed herself to shed any sense of coolness. Leon pressured her into seizing the audience with her warmth. Her voice was sweet and her movements genuine.

Emma Hudson received never to be forgotten words of heartfelt praise from Stephen Daldry. I think this triggered some tears at the onset, but I treasured seeing her convincing portrayal touched by a sense of loss. She makes Lee Hall's lines live. Debbie, in Emma's hands, is a bundle of conflicting feelings. Her affection for Billy emerges gently, with some playful shenanigans along the way.

Tom Higgins has taken what some would call a minor role and made it major. His press-ups and shadowing and enthusiastic singing are memorable. He gives it all continuity, impossible to ignore.

And then there is Joey! All the comments I have heard about Joey failed to prepare me for the emotional rollercoaster he put us through. He is touching, brave, funny and convincing as a very complex Michael. The word mirror will never again be uttered around me without making me smile. And how he can dance and sing! He didn't try to overpower Leon. Leon worked so beautifully to show us a friend, totally dedicated to letting Michael shock him and draw him into song and dance on Joey's terms. I guess that is what they mean by collaboration.

I felt a combination of elation and sadness with this night of change. You only needed to hang around the Stage Door to see how much the youngsters in the cast mean to Hadyn Gwynn. The ballet girls were not about to leave until they shared hugs with Hadyn.

I said to Hadyn: "I will see you on Broadway." A big smile told me that she would enjoy crafting a Tony-worthy performance.

bobbyswfla

I was so upset i started crying at the begginging!! That was for Tom! Cause hes so adorable, and he had just been really cute outside! Plus you could see how upset Stephanie looked the minute she came onstage!! Well done to all the ballet girls in shine! I thought Haydn was gonna burst into tears, becuae sometimes she didnt get the words out!

Ann gave this show her all! Well done! I'm glad that we're not losing her yet!

Solidarity was amazing!! The ballet girls last big number! The amazing choreography and Leon all in the middle of it!! I love Solidarity now!!

Then on came joey! And i got really upset in a happy way. Joey I LOVED THE LIPPY!!! He totally deserved the appluase for his special time to look in the mirrror!! we're never ever gonna hear it in that way again!!

Joey gave expressing yourself everything! He couldnt have done better! The way he was hugging the ballet girls as dresses when they came on was soo sweet!! As soon as Leon and Joey shouted Express there really was a loud noise from the audience!! the billy row was the first to stand, and then so did the rest of the theartre! joey was making the most of it!!

The letter was sweet!! haydn was crying, leon was...so was stephanie! the whole theatre was!

The angry dance was amazing!!! I wondered whether leon would throw his shoes to the audience!! and he did!! YAY!

hmm i just remembered i still have to do act 2

Well it was amazing...i loved it. i cried so much at the end. I was so shocked the way stephanies voice wobbled, because shes usually such a wonderful performer, and the way she couldnt stop herself from crying showed how much she enjoyed the show! You gotta love Steph! Miss you!!

Joey made me smile/cry!!! after all i didnt want to spend the last few seconds of joey with my view obstructed becuae of tears! So i didnt cry!

Well Done!! an amazing show! LEON!!! YOU WERE AMAZING!!!!!!!

graceluvsva

Well I'm going to make a short review as I have tons of coursework to do

Everyone's said it all already but expressing yourself really was amazing! Leon's lipstick looked classy Electricity was the best I've seen Leon perform it, he's improved so much his dancing is a joy to watch and his acting skills are very detailed and well, er, good ! It was strange seeing a different Dad, I think I prefer Phil's Dad but I liked the way he just kept saying yes and no during the audition scenes, at first I thought he'd forgotten his lines!

There were no big mistakes at all. At the beginning the 'screen' that has the film projected onto it looked like it wasn't going to come all the way down, but some of the ensemble handled it and it was down in a blink of an eye! Joey as Michael tonight was properly one of the strongest characters as ever! All his scenes had everything he had put into them, and the goodbye scene at the very end was very moving.

Haydn as usual gave a perfect performance, her goodbye scene had that something little extra to it tonight for obvious reasons, shine was amazing although you could see at times she looked a bit upset but who could blame her?

was nice to meet so many of you, and talking to Grace and Joanne, I think Joanne had one of the best seats in the theatre

Have to go do some coursework now Sorry it wasn't too detailed but I think with the amount of reviews we have already my one isn't going to matter much

DQplum

Sorry that I couldn't mix with many of you that very night as we were a bit late for supper and got a lousy slow service, so I had to rush (without eating) as an advance party to the VP to exchange the 5 agency-tickets in the Dress circle against the real ones, then meet Jackie (jaxx) who had kindly agreed to exchange their two tickets in the last row of the dress circle against my additional two in the stalls. So many thanks again, Jackie, so very kind - as I was now sitting just behind my family and could see their reactions to the show! Then I bought programmes and rushed out again to find and direct them to their seats - just in time. And no time to deliver to Lin the three bars of Cadbury I had in my jacket - they later nearly ruined my jacket as they melted away in that nearly unbearable hot climate up in the dress circle...

Well, grandchildren and family were well prepared: they loved the movie, loved the OCR and knew much of the text of the songs by heart, have been silent observers of this wonderful forum for quite a while, and got all the TV clips and videos through me - so the expectations were pretty high - but they were just blown away by the real thing, and of course the atmosphere and the emotions of the special night only added to that - it just was far beyond any expectation and any former experience with musicals! (They had seen Phantom of the Opera, Starlight Express, and Lions King in Germany before.) So their mother and the two younger ones immediately wanted to go again the very next evening (sorry, there are no performances on Sundays), whereas the older one and the father found it fantastic as well, but thought it quite weird to go again so soon. But I would think they all will return during summer holidays or in October latest. Just one example how well my granddaughter was aware of things: immediately after being seated in the second but last row in the dress circle she spotted from there James's Mum in the first row in the stalls (!) and concluded, where she is must be James, so she rushed downstairs during the interval - I could hardly follow - to find him and get an autograph! The only sad thing was that her still favourite "Billy", George, was not there that so fantastic night! (And of course after the show she and her brother - the two blond youngsters - managed bravely to get to the front of the waiting crowd at the stage door and got signatures from all the stars of the evening!)

It was nice to have met Justin and a few Forum members at the Stage Door pub the evening before and then after the 02 June show at the stage door again. And Justin convinced me to go for a ticket for Monday 05 June night to see the new cast - and even after I had delivered my family to the airport-express, at 17:30 (all stalls sold) I still got a very nice ticket in the dress circle on the term "best available": G 16 and could meet and chat with some of you again at the stage door.

My next tour: definitely for next cast-change-last-night in September, but sorry, not before! And I hope to meet more of you then!

PaulWilly

This was the third time I have seen Leon (it had to be Leon as Billy didn't it, as he and Joey were, of course, originally paired together when they started back in September), and this was by far the best performance I have seen from him. Leon looked like he really wanted to give Joey, Emma, Haydn, Stephanie, Tom, Michael and the ballet girls a rousing send off, and his acting, dancing and singing needed no words to describe how he felt about losing so many friends.

Highlights of Leon's performance? Keeping the hat on his head for at least a couple of minutes during Expressing Yourself! His Electricity was just incredible and powerful with one of the longest applauses I have seen after this song. And his Letter reprise. I have never known Leon to get emotional before, but after the first couple of lines, his voice cracked, and you knew his crying was for real, nothing being acted here. His choked up voice expressing his feelings on saying goodbye for good to his dead mum/Stephanie.

Talking of Stephanie, she is the only actress I have seen playing the part of dead mum in the 14 times I have seen the show and I just can't imagine anyone else taking her place.

By contrast this was the first time I had seen David Bardsley as Dad and he plays the role in quite a different way to Phil Whitchurch. David doesn't have the humour of Phil, such as in the scene with the ballet dancer during Billy's audition, but I did like his surprised reaction to the ring of Mrs Wilkinson's doorbell! I also liked his rendition of Deep into the Ground, not as emotionally charged as Phil's, but still very moving with a good clear voice.

Nothing can be added to Haydn's usual brilliant portrayal of Mrs Wilkinson. You could tell this would be a very emotional night for her as has made the role her own and she has been the bedrock of the show since it started.

Emma acted her socks off as usual and her little kiss to Leon in the ballet school towards the end was very touching.

And so to Mr Phillips himself. What can one say about Joey that hasn't already been said? So much stood out about his final performance. The plastering of Leon's face with lipstick resulting in Leon really having to look in the mirror to inspect the damage! His "time to look in the miiiiirrrroor" was hilarious as always. The flashing of his shorts at the end of Expressing Yourself. The hand warming scene in the boxing hall. And finally, the heartbreaking farewell with Billy, where Leon does not just kiss Joey but hugs him as well, this followed by Michael's tearful anguish at losing his best friend, with the curtain very slowly lowering in front of him, hiding his sorrow as he watches Billy walk off to a new life.

There was just one disappointing aspect of Saturday night for me, and it has nothing to do with the show itself. Stalls row R was too far back for you to be really involved in everything. You miss out on all the little details such as facial expressions, banter between the cast, the poignancy and emotion. I would definitely advise people to try for closer seats if at all possible.

At the stage door after the show Joey and Leon had their usual heart warming smiles which would brighten anyone's day, and both had so much time to chat to their fans, sign autographs and have photos taken.

The star at the stage door must surely have been young Tom Higgins who emerged wearing a Billy Elliot T-shirt, sucking a lollipop, sitting astride a giant man's shoulders (don't know who he was).

Had a few words with Leon's mum who said that Leon was asked to dye his hair for the show, but his natural dark colour should grow back when he finishes.

Before the show I also managed to briefly speak to Stephen Daldry to say how much I enjoyed the show, and he replied saying that was very sweet of me, and shook my hand. What a wonderful, charming man!

There may still be a few First Anniversary posters left. As I was buying a programme at the merchandise counter before the show at about 7:20pm, Mary Malone, the front of house sales manager, came up with a box of about 20 of these posters and the sales lady just pulled a random one out of the box for me which turned out to be number 178 out of the 200 signed. Unfortunately there are no new posters of Leon and the ones of Travis haven't come out yet.

Really pleased to have finally met some more forum members in particular Yam!, Malcolm, Electricity, and of course Lin, once again!

Dancer

For months I have been driving my best friend, Crimson, crazy with Billy stories and video clips, and I was so glad he was finally able to see it with me, and happier still that he loved it. As this was the final performance of Haydn Gwyne as Mrs. Wilkinson, the eight Billys were in the audience (later on stage), and I even had a chance to chat with fellow Canadian and Elton John's domestic partner, David Furnish. Sitting in C24, this was my first time seeing Leon, but the highlight of the evening had to be the final performance of the talented and broad-smiling Joey Phillips. When the curtain came down on Joey's final scene after Leon gave him an impromptu hug, his tears were genuine and contagious. After the show, I had an opportunity to speak with Joey as we had our picture taken together, and he seemed quite impressed that I one of the reasons I had come from Canada was to see his final show. Dean laughed when I told him that I thought he did well being interviewed by a talking turkey. The fun and beer-drinking with other international forum members continued late into the evening.

AccordCanada

There was a great air of anticipation in the theatre as 7.30 approached and a few minutes later, Stephen Daldry climbed onto the stage to loud applause. You knew that tonight would be something very special.

Stephen gave a wonderful speech introducing those from the cast who would be leaving, ballet girls, Emma, Joey, Stephanie and Haydn. He spoke warmly of the contribution they have all made - the wonderful personalities of Emma and Joey, the haunting legacy that Stephanie will leave the show with and the professionalism and warmth of Haydn.

And then the show started. Tonight it was Leon as Billy, exciting for me having never seen him in the role before.

Haydn's opening scene was greeted with loud applause and the same for Stephanie. Needless to say, at the end of Expressing Yourself, Joey took an extra special bow and many in the audience rose to their feet including Liam, Travis, Matthew, Brad, Ryan and all the other Billy's, Michael's and Debbie's who were sitting together, two rows in front of me. Joey delivered a wonderful camp performance

You could tell that tonight's performance meant something very special to those on stage. Everyone rose to the occasion. It was the most polished performance I've seen since the very early days.

I love Leon's Billy. He delivers a very understated performance which captures the real essence of the character, a boy who discovers dance, loves it and wants more, a real, true, raw talent. Leon is not raw in his talent but he portrays that rawness perfectly, particularly during those early scenes in the dance hall with the ballet girls and Mrs Wilkinson looking on.

David Bardsley was Dad in this performance. He delivers a very different interpretation to Phil or Tim, harder and drunker yet he manages to see the way through to understanding that Billy needs his encouragement and support.

Emma was on fine form, milking the line about showing Billy her fanny and at the end when Billy says his goodbyes to the ballet girls he has trained with for months, she added a lovely personal touch going to Leon and kissing him. Beautiful

The final scenes were wrought with emotion. At the very end when Billy says goodbye to his dead mum for the last time, the emotions really showed through. Both Leon and Stephanie were clearly in tears and that emotion just added to what is an incredibly touching scene anyway.

My final thoughts must go to Haydn Gwynne. We talk and read so much about the youngsters in the cast. Tonight Stephen Daldry summed it up when he spoke of Haydn as "the rock on which the show has been built". He couldn't have summed it up better. I for one will really miss her! I have seen her in many shows on stage and screen over the years. She is an actress of great ability yet I'm sure this role has been one of the toughest. Working with hundreds of kids, rehearsing differently with each Billy, supporting those kids on and off stage and brilliantly creating her own role..... Stephen mentioned that Mrs Wilkinson was going to have a dog originally, but the idea was soon cut. I don't blame him. Working with animals and children..... I think she had enough to do! *lol*

Tonight Haydn gave what for me was in many ways the best performance I've seen from her in the show. It was my eighth Billy and the fifth time seeing Haydn. She is in every way a superb actress and tonight as she said her farewell to Billy, you could see how much it meant to her. There was no need for acting at that point! And in the curtain calls, the tears were wiped away before all the current Billy's as well as James came on to present flowers to those leaving.

Another great adventure for this wonderful Billy family is about to begin but for tonight I raise a glass and say a big thank you to Joey, Emma, the girls, Stephanie and Haydn for the wonderful times you have given us and best wishes to you all for the future xx

theatre paul

The evening performance was all I was hoping for and more. I was very happy to see Joey as Michael. He was superb, as said in other reviews, he was certainly milking his last show. Making little pranks (like the lipstick in Leon's face). I'm sad I will not see him perform in the show another time, but I'm glad I at least saw him once. It was nice to see Leon for a whole show. He is a good Billy and a wonderful dancer. I'm glad he got the chance to perform on such a special night.

Haydn... wow, what an actress. She is such a convincing Mrs Wilkinson. She was rightly mentioned in Stephen Daldry's speech. The show was built around her. She was the constant factor in the show with all the changing and rotating cast. That is quite an accomplishment. I'm very happy that I got her picture and autograph. Hope she has a nice time to unwind after such a long run in the show. Take your time Haydn and good luck in your next project.

Tom Higgins and Michael Greenhill were good. I was totally convinced by the swearing and 'Wanker' shouting Tom. He was a great laugh and quite cute and cheeky. We will certainly see more of him. Michael has many small parts in the musical and he does them brilliantly. He deserved his part of the applause.

Emma showed a very likable and strong Debbie. I could see she had a mega experience in the show, as she was sharp and very good. Stephen did her right to mention her in a very special way.

My absolute best moment in this performance was the scene with Billy leaving. Leon was so kewl hugging Joey, they seem like good friends. I could not help wiping some moist from my eyes when the curtain closed with a crying Joey, it was a sad, happy and emotional moment. Joey, good luck in the next step in your career. I'm sure you will do well whatever you do.

Photofreak

Final Memories

“ As Billy says: "I haven't got the words".

And to Haydn: "We'll miss you, miss."

To Stephanie: "Love you forever". ” Tony

“ I really have no words to describe tonight other than to say unforgettable. It was very emotional and to be perfectly honest I cried through most of the performance ” Bob_Bobson

“ My heartfelt thanks go to Haydn for bringing such "va-va-voom" not only to her role, but the whole production - Sally certainly has some mighty big shoes to fill, so let's all wish her well.

It really is sad that a show such as this MUST, by it's very definition, have regular cast changes in the younger roles, but it's the only way that it can go on.

We can only hope that all of those leaving tonight, despite their obvious distress, have had at least a good a time doing the show, as we have had watching it, and will remember a truly exceptional period in their lives. ” Hokey

“ My abiding memory of last night will be after the show, and Joey walking up the street away from the stage door, to a spontaneous round of applause. Turning round to acknowledge us with that smile that could of lit london up! ” Yam!

“ Firstly, yesterday was a special day just on the basis of it being the biggest meeting of billy fans ever. Nice to put faces to few names. It was so hard trying to track everyone down!, so sorry to those I missed. ” Yam!

“ I would just like to add to how wonderful the performance was. In expressing yourself you could see that Joey was on top form and gave it his all as well as leon with nice touches like "get ready for the big finish, a very big finish" with Joey's reply "last time guys!" it choked me up. I will really miss him, he brought something so unique to the role! i will write more later i'm so knackered, it's mentally draining that show ” Billy fan

“ It was such a great night and I am so glad I was there. Thank you to everyone that made it so special ” **Jess**

“ Just wanted to add what a fantastic job the chaperones did last night, dealing with quite a difficult crowd-control situation in a calm and good-humoured way. Thanks also to the cast and crew for being so accomodating with the numerous fans, cameras and autograph hunters before, during and after the show. It was very much appreciated and helped to make a really good atmosphere for a very special show. ” **james_234**

“ Emotional, incredible and energentic.

This surpassed all of my expectations and for me succeeded May 12th. ” **Michael Fan**

“ To Haydn Gwynne, Joey Philips, Emma Hudson, Stephanie Putson, Tom Higgins, Michael Greenhill and the wonderfully accomplished ballet girls - a really big thank you for the pleasure and enjoyment you have given us all. We wish you success, happiness and good health for years to come. ” **PerformingArtsFan**

“ The emotion was highly charged throughout as has been described. How anyone could have come away dry-eyed would beggar belief. All the leaving cast fully deserved their raptuous applause, as did the non-leavers. ” **Malcolm**

“ oh my dear lord, yesterday was such an experience - i won't review it as everyone has already said everything i'd say lol. i was sitting a couple of rows behind the young cast and it was great to see them launch into standing ovations to support their friends! tbh, i dont cry much any more at the show but last night i was in floods - especially when Leon gave Joey a hug right at the very end. ” **Poppy**

“ I think someone has already mentioned the audience - they were perfect - largely led by the Forum, they stopped the action at signifcnet points and gave due recognition to those leaving. I'm sure the cast appreciated the rapt attention, the cheers, the ovations.

So - well done the audience!!! ” **Tony**

“ A great night that I will remember for a very long time thanks to all the cast - those staying and those leaving - and to you guys who made the atmosphere so fantastic!
Best wishes to Haydn and Stephanie - I'll really miss your fantastic harmonies in the Letter scene - and best wishes to all the children moving on to great things in the future. Joey, your Michael will be greatly missed.
Thank you all for a truly memorable year of shows - every one of them!”

“ joey,emma,hayden and ballet girls :we will miss you forever as you were just stunning in every single show!!” **Nicola**

“ Yes I'm still deeply affected by Saturday It was such a wonderful show and the atmosphere was so fantastic, I was so tearful at the end not only because the show itself was so emotionally charged but because I didn't want it to end.” **Helen**

“ The 2 shows on June 3rd were fantastick. What made the day totally GREAT, was hanging out with forum members from all over the world, basically 12 noon untill midnight while sharing many BE experiences ”
New York Fan

“ it was emotionally draining, i couldn't bear to watch as the curtain came down as it just broke my heart seeing Joey cry. I don't know if i could take Liams aswell, i felt quite depressed for a few days after that show. but it was amazing, no doubt about it! i just can't begin to imagine how the cast felt.” **Billy fan**

“ 1 month has passed since Haydn, Emma and Joey performed for the last time. A last and big THANK YOU to them for sharing so much emotions with the audience. I will always remember the hug of Leon to Joey, Emma giving a kiss to Leon and the huge cheer when Haydn entered at the beginning of Shine. The atmosphere was so electric !” **Remi**