

Les Mis at 30: original London cast reunite to celebrate



Past and current cast members sing the closing ceremony for the Les Misérables 30th anniversary gala performance
Credit: Daniel Leal-Olivas/PA Wire

Les Misérables, the world's longest-running musical, celebrated its 30th birthday yesterday with a charity gala performance at the Queen's Theatre in the West End.

Presided over by Cameron Mackintosh, the producer, and creators Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg, members of the cast were joined on stage by actors from the original line-up.

These included Colm Wilkinson, the Irish tenor who first played Jean Valjean and Roger Allam, the actor from The Thick of It, the BBC television series, who was Valjean's arch enemy, the policeman Javert.



Frances Ruffelle, Colm Wilkinson and Patti Lupone during the rehearsal for the 30th anniversary gala performance
Credit: Doug Peters

Mackintosh introduced an extended encore to the performance of the musical.

The encore featured Frances Ruffelle and Patti LuPone, the actresses who first played the two tragic heroines Eponine and Fantine, and four actors to have sung Jean Valjean, including Wilkinson and Peter Lockyer, the current incumbent.

The 130-strong cast of schoolchildren who will be taking part in a forthcoming production at the Cardiff Millennium Centre sang the anthem *Do You Hear the People Sing?*, and the entire original London cast came on stage for an ensemble rendition of *One Day More*, as confetti in red, white and blue rained down on the audience.



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Herbert Kretzmer, who wrote the English language lyrics to the musical, adapting and extending Boublil's original libretto, also came on stage. Having turned 90 earlier in the week, he was serenaded with a rendition of "Happy Birthday" from the audience and cast.

The night, in which 40 per cent of the tickets were made available for purchase by fans via a lottery system, was in aid of the Syria Children's Appeal by Save the Children Fund.

Guests from the theatre world and beyond included Jonathan Pryce, Anthony Andrews and Tom Daley.

Les Misérables opened at the Barbican theatre, London, on October 8 1985, a production by the RSC that arrived with impressive credentials: Trevor Nunn and John Caird directing, and Mackintosh, who already had the smash hit of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* under his belt, producing. Mackintosh had seen an earlier, French-language version of the musical adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel and had worked with lyricists Boublil and Kretzmer, as well as composer Schönberg to hone the piece for British audiences.



Producer Cameron Mackintosh (centre) at the rehearsal for the Les Mis 30th anniversary performance Credit: Doug Peters

Notwithstanding Mackintosh's supposed Midas touch, reviewers initially poured scorn on the musical. It was only after the box office reported huge ticket sales that the RSC realised they had a hit on their hands.

In a film shown at the end of last night's performance, before the encore, Ruffelle was shown being interviewed in 1986, after the musical had been running for a single year, and was asked how long she thought it would last.



Hugh Jackman with Isabelle Allen in the film version of Les Mis Credit: Universal/Everett/Rex Features

“[At least another 30 years](#),” she said. Prescient – Mackintosh called it “clairvoyant” last night – but at the time it would have been far from obvious. Since then, the musical has been seen by nearly 70 million people in 44 countries and in 22 languages. In 2012 it was made into [an Oscar-winning film](#) starring Hugh Jackman, Eddie Redmayne and Anne Hathaway.

Last night, the story of Valjean, a convict who breaks his parole to reform and rise to be mayor of his town, received, perhaps predictably, a standing ovation. But the show has weathered fairly well, particularly in the second half when Valjean's story comes together with a dramatisation of the failed 1832 uprising when students barricaded the Paris streets.

The momentum – almost too fast at times – and rousing pop opera tunes still pack a punch, and have the power to move.

Lockyer can muster a falsetto nearly as impressive as Wilkinson – they matched each other for high notes in the encore. Carrie Hope Fletcher as Eponine and Phil Daniels as the wicked innkeeper Thenardier stood out in the supporting cast.