



# Martin Guerre reborn

*Martin Guerre* premiered on July 10 at London's Prince Edward Theatre, replete with a technical production that fully justified that overused epithet 'state-of-the-art'. But the critical verdict was less fulsome than Cameron Mackintosh likes to hear. Now partly re-written, **Chris Everard** reports on the show's advanced theatre audio design, and **Louise Stickland** summarises its spectacular visuals

**N**icholas de Jongh's review for the London *Evening Standard* set the tone for the first night notices, describing the show as: "a Woman's Own, multi-million pound fantasy musical for the Nineties, an erotic dream in several acts with enough seething climaxes written into the score by Claude-Michel Schonberg, creator with Alain Boubil of *Les Miserables* and *Miss Saigon*, to satisfy even the greediest seeker of cheap musical thrills. But thrills apart, *Martin Guerre* comes a limping third to its two famous predecessors."

Edward Hardy's lyrics were slated as "banal". Declan Donnellan's production, Nick Ormerod's set and Bob Avian's choreography were praised while stars Iain Glen, Juliette Caton, Michael Matus and Matt Rawle emerged with honours intact. The invited audience quoted by the *Standard* proved more generous – but few, it seemed, could remember a hummable tune from the show.

This was not what such a mega-successful musical team wanted to swallow (even though *Les Mis* and *Miss Saigon* had both faced their share of critical write-offs on their openings) and so parts of the musical's first act – in a pragmatic swallowing-of-artistic-pride action virtually unprecedented in West End history – were rewritten in just two months.

*Martin Guerre* relaunched in London in November and with millions staked upfront Sir Cameron will be hoping the new word on the tourist trail grapevine will put it back up there on the long-term success stakes. The song, if not the script, remains the same...

## The sound of *Martin Guerre* Report by Chris Everard

Loathsome load-outs in biting, chilly winds on grey winter mornings and relentless trucking may be left behind when we enter the world of theatre sound reinforcement – but the daily graft is replaced with new mind-stressing production problems and a primary objective to consistently repeat flawless, broadcast-quality mixes on a seven-day week, eight-performance rota.

The venue might be static, and the back-breaking rigging and de-rigging reduced, but the live sound engineers who ply their craft in Theatreland must satisfy the world's most erudite, culturally-informed audiences who, very often, have forked out twice the price of a stadium rock concert ticket to be entertained by performers who are as well-known to the paying public as Oasis or that bloke from Pulp...

Another occupational hazard of sound designing and mixing a famous show which is in concurrent multiple production across the world's capitals, is that some of the most seasoned audience members in the auditorium will be judging the technical and artistic performance against their experience of having seen the same show in Sydney, LA or on Broadway.

## Around The World In 80 Days...

The production expenses involved in creating impressive musicals such as the Cameron Mackintosh organisation promotes are as equally great (and often far more expensive) than a stadium rock concert.

*Martin Guerre*, which recently re-opened at

London's Prince Edward Theatre with a cast of over thirty performers and a small orchestra supplying the rich sonic tapestry to accompany this visually stunning production, features the 'full monty' of modern, technologically advanced sound and lighting equipment to stage a sumptuous production which is performed six days a week with eight shows.

On the day I visited the Prince Edward Theatre radio controlled trucks (two-tiered pieces of staging on which the cast singers perform) were being tested. Moving silently from the wings to the central rear of the stage, these two trucks were built especially for the show by Stage Technologies, able to smoothly trundle along without the need for ropes nor wires – whilst the performers sing their hearts out monitoring the sound from the orchestra via mini monitors installed inside the wooden structure of these impressive pieces of mobile staging.

## Front Of House

Sound designer for the production is Andrew Bruce of Autograph Sound Recording, who supplied a comprehensive system covering all aspects of the sound design, as well as those of communications and CCTV.

As I entered the auditorium to meet Andrew and Robin Whitakker from Outboard Electronics – who were supplying two Octopus automated mixers for the show – I found that the majority of the seats in the stalls had been converted temporarily into something that resembled NASA's Mission Control, with well over 40 different kinds of VDU in operation and every workstation having at least one telephone, fax machine and com- ➔ p38