



PHANTOM

THE LAS VEGAS SPECTACULAR

When I first walked into the marvellous creation that is the opera house built for *Phantom* in The Venetian, I was literally gobsmacked. I have never seen anything specifically built for a musical on a scale such as this.

I thought back to *Phantom's* first performance in the tiny 100-seat theater at Sydmonton which is home to my annual arts festival. I remembered how the power of the music and story swept our audience along. But I wondered whether a musical that often has only the two central characters on stage could survive in such a gorgeous yet astonishing and huge setting.

Then I remembered that many people had similar misgivings about *Phantom's* second production on Broadway. For in London we perform in Her Majesty's Theatre in a space that is probably less than half the size of our Broadway home, The Majestic.

But *Phantom*, in Hal Prince's safe hands, sailed through in its new home to become the longest-running show in Broadway history.

Three things struck me when I first saw the spectacular Vegas production. First, that Hal had created a spectacle in the best sense of the word and always prompted by and at the service of the music. Some of the moments, such as the creation of the outside of the Paris Opera House in front of our very eyes are astonishing in their stagecraft. But never are they out of harness with the music.

Secondly, I was struck that all the intimate scenes played as well as ever, especially the gorgeous looking rooftop scene and the wondrously decadent Phantom's lair.

Thirdly, I was struck by just how great the orchestra sounded. I've never heard the score played live so well. The Venetian's Opera House almost caresses it.

So, Hal's Vegas *Phantom* may be truly spectacular and staggering in terms of its stagecraft but it is spectacle with a heart. The love story that is *The Phantom of the Opera* beats as strongly as ever.

My only worry when I left the theater? What on earth is another story that can start life in a theater of 100 seats and over 20 years later remain as true in such an extraordinary production as this one at The Venetian?

Andrew Lloyd Webber



