

Cinderella

Date

6th December 2017

Society

Wranglers Theatre Company

Venue

The Muse Theatre

Type of Production

Pantomime

Director

Wendy Holmes

Musical Director

n/a

Choreographer

Wendy Holmes & Ricky-Lee White

Report

My third pantomime of this festive season and what a fun evening's entertainment it was too! Much to my embarrassment, I had not seen a Wranglers' production before, but I have always heard such good things about the company and this performance did not disappoint. The intimate Muse Theatre was buzzing and it was evident from the moment I arrived in the foyer that there was clearly lots of excitement and anticipation among the audience. Having collected my ticket and met with director Wendy Holmes (again I confess to not having met Wendy before) I settled into my seat for this most famous of pantomimes. As I say, 'Cinderella' did not disappoint my expectations and it was clear from the big opening number that we were in for a fun and energy-packed performance from a large cast ranging from the very young to the more senior.

The opening number quite rightly introduced the title role immediately and, as Cinders, Kerry Hore was ideally cast. She is classically beautiful, with a delicate physique and has just the right tone of voice for our protagonist, both when she was speaking and singing. Her dialogue was clear and she captivated the audience.

As Prince Charming, Jack Higman is blessed with the good looks and heroic presence for a fairy tale prince, and he has a great voice for such a character too. Both his dialogue and his singing were excellent and I especially enjoyed his self-awareness in the role – always ready with a wink or a nod of the head to parody his 'charm'.

Of course, no panto is complete without its dame and in this 'Cinderella', we were indulged with two dames, as the ugly sisters. This was an excellent and very funny double act, played by Gareth Davis as Lulabelle and Josh

Cook as Louella. Gareth Davis is an experienced and accomplished dame, clearly reveling in this role and holding the audience in the palm of his hand whenever he was on. Their business was always very entertaining and slick – I especially enjoyed the interplay with the front row of children, the famous ghost scene and the comedy during a love duet. Fabulous fun throughout.

In the role of Buttons, Jonathan Clarke was outstanding. From his first entrance, he commanded and enjoyed a fantastic rapport with the audience, engaging with us in a brilliant way and exuding warmth and cheeky charm throughout. His skill and ability to break the fourth wall and sustain that energy was so impressive. His is a rare talent and I look forward to seeing him on stage again soon.

As Dandini (always a tricky role I think) Nieve Fay was excellent too. She could quite easily have played Prince Charming in a more traditional production - her humour emerged more and more as the performance moved into the second act. A very good actor with a great singing voice, I would like to see more of her in the future. In supporting roles were Alison Davis as the wicked step mother Lavinia, Samantha Ansell as Fairy Godmother, Jamie Corson as Fairy Godfather (which was an unusual but interesting idea), Matthew Day as Baron and Albert Gilmore as Herald. All very good in their roles.

Act Two did take a rather bizarre turn in this production, when we found ourselves in a parody of ‘Blind Date’ which, for me, did not work and which felt too much like padding when the plot was almost resolved. I could understand the concept and it reminded me of Lord Farquaad’s game show sequence in ‘Shrek’, but perhaps it could have been a shorter scene and more dynamic? It was good to see writer Geoff Coventry in a cameo appearance as Paul O’Grady.

The ensemble of villagers were full of energy and fun throughout the performance, with some magical scenes featuring the elves – especially one or two of the youngest! This was pure comedy gold and the audience loved every scene in which the young elves appeared.

The set was simple but effective, allowing lots of space for the large cast to dance in the big routines. Lighting and sound were good, although at times the balance between some singers and the musical accompaniment meant we could not hear some voices adequately. In this scenario, I think either a decision has to be made for *all* soloists to use a microphone, or nobody does and the accompaniment is quieter. Well done to director/choreographer Wendy Holmes and choreographer Ricky-Lee White for staging such a fun and entertaining pantomime, which clearly highlighted this company’s strengths and its community values. This was a very happy evening at the theatre and I am looking forward to seeing the Wranglers again in 2018.

Gareth Davies

NODA SW District 3

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough PE2 7UH

Tel01733374790 **Fax**01733237286 **Email**info@noda.org.uk **Web**www.noda.org.uk

Twitter @NODAtweets **Facebook** NationalOperaticDramaticAssociation

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