

Aladdin (Panto)

Date

Thursday 5th December 2019

Society

The Wranglers Theatre Company

Venue

The Muse Theatre

Type of Production

Pantomime

Director

Wendy Holmes

Musical Director

n/a

Choreographers

Wendy Holmes with Claire Field and Ricky-Lee White

Report

The Wranglers' annual panto is now something I look forward to truly beginning my Christmas! For 2019 they presented 'Aladdin', written once again by their resident panto king Geoff Coventry. 'Aladdin' was again a good, traditional family pantomime, with excellent colourful costumes, clever scenery and props from Geoff Coventry, superb makeup from Julie Farmer, Emily Andov with Carly Salisbury and lots of good singing, dancing and silly comedy throughout.

The experienced Wendy Holmes was once again directing, with a strong cast including another lovely performance in the title role by the very likeable Josh Cook as Aladdin, following his great performance as Jack last year.

The stage management was impressive and well-rehearsed, transitions between scenes were flawless, with good technical input - well done once again to Stage Manager John Little, his Stage Crew, Props and Technical crew, Paul Clark and Richard Steadman. Costumes were impressive this year, combining the glamour and 'showbiz' sequins of a panto with just the right nod to the original setting – which always strikes me as an odd mixture between Arabia and China! The Wranglers' Wardrobe department, in this case Sue McLoughlin with Jane Down, Angie Wilson, Emma Skedgell and Emily Andov with Paatchi Designs and Irene Willcocks, created so many fantastic costumes! Well done.

Musical accompaniment was again backing tracks, which generally works well in this context and were played at a balanced sound level – although sometimes voices were not clearly projected, which can be an issue for some actors if microphones are not used.

The large ensemble was once again made up of adults and children of all age groups, supporting the principal cast very well, dancing the contemporary choreography with energy and enthusiasm, and everyone appeared to be enjoying themselves immensely, which is always a highlight in Wranglers shows. It was great to see so many children encouraged to take part once again with some lovely moments of comedy and cuteness – again young Freddie Jones stood out for his cheeky character and natural star quality! The 'Wei Tu' group of maidens were fun in their individual ways and I particularly enjoyed their cynical parody of a romantic ballad!

In such a large cast of named roles it is challenging to comment on everyone, suffice to say I felt this production was well cast and every 'turn' was suitably entertaining. Alongside Josh Cook's Aladdin, Georgia Parnell gave an assured, well-sung performance as Princess Jasmine, Gareth Davis donned his array of frocks with an accomplished Widow Twankey, Jonathan Clarke took the comedy fool role again – this time as Wishy Washy. He is a master of performing in this genre. Writer Geoff Coventry played a convincing and menacing villain as the evil Abanazar (a peach of a role) and I loved his number 'Evil Like Me'. They were supported by the comedy duo Jamie Corson and Phoebe Skedgell as the silly local constabulary, Sergeant One Long Poo and PC Nina! In this production we were treated to not one, but two genies – the Genie of the Lamp played with panache and humour by Ethan Oakeshott and the Genie of the Ring, with the excellent Claire Field in this role. She has such presence and energy on stage, as well as being a brilliant dancer. Diane Sullivan must not be overlooked as Po the Panda, featuring in many scenes.

Generally, diction and clarity of words was good, and the pace of the production was effective from the start. Sometimes there were dropped lines, but these moments always add to the fun in panto and the experienced actors handled it with humility, humour and skill, involving the laughing audience in their pain! As far as the comedy goes my favourite scene was in Peking Park for the musical tour-de-force 'If I were not upon the stage'. This was a *very* funny number, performed with expertise, style and just the right level of self-awareness by all six actors.

Congratulations again to Director/Choreographer Wendy Holmes, co-choreographers Claire Field and Ricky-Lee White, and to all involved in bringing this very enjoyable traditional pantomime to life. Thank you for inviting me – it was another memorable evening at a Wranglers panto! The audience were thoroughly enjoying themselves from start to finish, including many Cub Scouts who were very engaged and vocal throughout!

This was a fitting tribute to Barry Sanigar MBE, who sadly passed away late in 2019 and to whom this production was dedicated. Barry was a key figure in The Wranglers (along with many other theatre companies in the Plymouth area) for many years and he leaves a great legacy in the district.

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