



Society : The Richings Players
Production : Alice
Date : 28th January 2012
Venue : Iver Village Hall
Report by : Rita Carpenter

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Under the superb direction of **Joe Gibbs** and Alison **Elcoat** this production truly was a trip to Wonderland. The clever and topical script was written by **Joe** with local references that the Iver audiences would appreciate.

It takes a clever choreographer to take untrained youngsters and turn them into a competent and polished troupe of dancers and this is exactly what **Ley Dobson** with assistance from **Sarah Pinckney** achieved. The **Wonderlanders, Butterflies, Glitter Attendants, Gardeners** and **Royal Attendants** were well rehearsed and performed with obvious enjoyment; even with limited space on stage they were a delight to see. **The Card Army** under the military eye of **Howard Gibbs** Master of the Cards gave an impressive marching performance. It would be unfair to name any of the children individually but in the croquet game there were two dear little hedgehogs who scurried about with glee much to the delight of the audience. The flamenco flamingoes were splendid, cleverly portraying fear when hunted by the Knave of Hearts.

Bethany Perry in the title role was a polished and mature Alice, word perfect and on stage for most of the time, she gave a convincing performance. She was a delight to watch, decked out in a little blue dress with a white pinafore. **Richard Campbell** was splendid as the fussy dithering White Rabbit scurrying about and generally looking distracted; his costume was amazing giving him an opportunity to waggle his white furry hips. **Sarah Pinkney** was very strong as The Knave of Hearts bringing just the right amount of boyish charm to the role. Her very fetching costume, complete with red heart added to her appeal. A special accolade should go to **Will Torrent** who was outstanding as the Cheshire Cat, certainly a sophisticat with a charm that excused his naughtiness. His costume and make-up were exceptional. He was seated on a raised dais at the side of the stage on a beautiful red velvet high backed chair, nonchalantly reading a newspaper. His rendition of stray cat strut was a delight.

The Queen of Hearts, the baddie of the story was magnificently played by **Shelley Dawson** who brought considerable drama to the role as she sailed across the stage as stately as a galleon. Not too scary to frighten the little ones but enough to get the audience hissing and booing at her every appearance, she was ably supported by **Tim Eady** as her hapless husband.

Dum and Dee were played by **Michael Penfold** and **Josh Webber** brought comedy to the story, not the usual overstuffed Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee but two workmen in the style of Ant and Dec who worked extremely well as a duo.

The Mad Hatter's tea party was extraordinary, **Michael Lucas** as the Mad Hatter gave a first rate performance, **Cathy Webber** in the guise of the March Hare was engaging and the dear little dormouse played by **Kathy Williams** was charming and well portrayed. The other characters at the table were engaging and the props were first rate, I especially liked the oversized tea cups. Credit must go to whoever designed and made the extraordinary table on which characters were able to stand and dance.

Adrian Uzzell played Cook, not the usual camp overacted dame one tends to see, he brought an air of laissez faire to the role which was original and refreshing. **Shelley Dawson** as Mary Ann, Cook's daughter and the love interest of The Knave brought a youthful charm to the role.

The caterpillar played by **Nigel Gravette** was flamboyantly costumed and turned into a fine butterfly and **Peter Gibbs** shone as the sparkling Golden Gryphon. **Kathryn Pike** made a very glamorous Queen of Diamonds albeit in a small role but was beautifully dressed in white satin. An amusing touch came from **Anthony Salamone** as the Gok Turtle brought in to turn Mary Ann into a princess.

SETS, LIGHTING and SOUND

It is not easy to build convincing sets on a small village hall stage but credit must go to the set designers and stage crew too many to mention by name. The tree with the opening into which Alice fell at the beginning was a masterpiece. All the sets were cleverly crafted, well constructed and designed in such a way that they gave depth to the stage with plenty of entrances and exits to accommodate the large cast. Lighting throughout was impressive and the sound was of high quality, especially the echo effect used for Alice's fall into Wonderland.

The band under the musical direction of **Marg Abbott** skillfully accompanied the singers throughout. The chorus were lively and movements were well executed, all the principals had fine singing voices and the choice of songs was first rate. Solo and group numbers were all expertly performed. The final community song while the principals are preparing for the finale, though quite complicated, was performed with gusto especially by the younger members of the cast. Some of the scenes had fast and furious dances in them but even with a large number the chaos always seemed well organized.

The costumes from **Linda Lucas, Sara Williams, Kathryn Pike, Joan Gibbs, Teresa Dawson, Rose Nicola,** and **Betty Siddall** were magnificent, brightly coloured and suited to each character with care. The makeup artists **Linda Bainbridge, Sally Copas, Lisa La Salle** and team, are to be commended for their professional work. The effects were brilliant.

The programme was well designed, clearly set out and the NODA reference noticeably placed.

The lively pace kept the audience engaged throughout. This was one of the most professional pantomimes I have had the good fortune to attend and I look forward to being invited to future productions.