

National Operatic & Dramatic Association

Report



Society : The Richings Players

Production : Panto In Space

Date : 30/01/03

Venue : Iver Village Hall

Report by : John Draper

THE PRODUCTION

Staging productions written “in house” is always a challenge. There is a chance of the author being over-protective of his “baby” and of the cast feeling they could improve on it.

If this happened here, it didn’t show. This was an evening where teamwork shone through so very brightly.

A CHANGE

This review is going to depart from my method of reviewing each production section in sequence, because, to me, this was an evening deserving something different.

I started out by making notes like “programme whetted appetite, ?stapling machine?, more paint on blocks, late start, orchestra V.G., imaginative costumes etc. And from about nine pages of similar would have created a review as described above.

About twenty minutes into the show I began to feel differently and during the interval, listening to the audience, I decided that “Panto In Space” was something special. Sure; the scenery wobbled and some things went wrong but feelings were “what the heck This is a relentlessly entertaining pantomime”. So although at the end I shall mention some areas which might help future productions, I have put the template back into the memory and I am going through my notes, and simply translate them into English.

This is also easier for me because, although I have learned to write in the dark, it is difficult to see the page when laughter tears blur your vision.

The costumes for the opening number: showed imagination, flair and contrast. The singing was powerful and tuneful and the balance between the cast and the highly professional orchestra was just right.

It was during “Somewhere Out There” that I started to get very impressed. The characters started to build and Doctor Watt was instantly very good and the early

Audience participation was well done. The back cloth was beautifully painted. Richard Stock’s ten year wait was well worth it. He gave a wonderful caricature performance.

The choreography and dancing were not only visually attractive but inventive and manoeuvred a quart sized cast brilliantly around a pint sized stage.

Rebecca Woods WD40 was superb. Her robotic movements didn’t falter throughout the entire show and her voice was perfect.

“Bad Boys” was sung with confidence and, by turning it to swing at the end, Ursula Embleton showed a touch of genius.

“Star Trekking” was bloody brilliant (my actual notes) with a great set from Robin Bishop and Neil Keveren.

Special mention must be made of all the Titan’s crew. Seen earlier in the chorus numbers, they radiated enthusiasm, commitment and total participation with wonderful smiles and exuberance.

And the landing of the space ship! A triumph for the design and build team and for the stage management. This is a good time to cover special effects, lighting and sound.

“Congratulations” doesn’t give you enough credit or do you justice. Perfection throughout.

The audience participation at the end of act one was the best I’ve seen since “Return To The Forbidden Planet” (So what’s wrong with a bit of plagiarism?)

As well as during the production numbers the music chosen for scene changes was both well chosen and played.

I do have to confess that when, in response to the consistently magnificent Xavier’s request for “clones”, the clowns appeared, I couldn’t write for laughing. And then their dance was beautifully well done. It must have been Ursula sitting audience left and you must have been very proud of them.

The Cow Dance was terrific. Not only hugely funny but also very skilful. To get one cow to dance as well as that would be good. To get three cows keeping accurate time was wonderful.

The ingenious dungeon set was coupled with yet more imaginative costumes.

During “Always Look ON The Bright Side Of Life” Nigel Gravette and Sue McCoan put the icing on the cake of two wondrously humorous performances.

Michael Lucas and Tara Bostock were brilliantly paired in the romantic leads. Tara looked and sounded wonderful. Dammit Janet was great and Michael's painful thigh slapping was hilarious.

Scottie played by James Howells was a wonderful characterisation. Whether the part was written thus or interpreted this way matters not. It was a role brilliantly played.

The voices of Lotte Fletcher-Jonk and Paul Weller combining for the reprise of "Send In The Clowns" were both perfect.

The announcement for the "no refund" was funny enough but the one about "budget spend and cast with funny hats" was the time I couldn't see again and wrote laughter/laughter/laughter.

What more can be said about Kirk Wootton's Number 2, except that he was great from the very start but his transformation into a fairy capped it all.

The final curtain number again included wonderful costumes and choreography. I wrote enthusiasm, energy, effervescence and excitement.

These qualities had been maintained throughout the show by everyone but were epitomised by Lotte in that final chorus. She showed how much the entire company were enjoying themselves. I can assure you, the audience did too.

JUST A FEW IDEAS

You should screen the orchestra. The reflected light from their music detracted the excellent lighting of the stage area. In addition the audience don't want to see the spaghetti of cables and it would have avoided the spectacle of the fish and chip supper.

Try and strengthen the set in scene one.

The Musical Director standing on her chair holding instructions was a distraction especially as the audience could see these "mirror fashion" and were concentrating on translating. Anne Torrent had done a brilliant job and the last minute urging was unnecessary.

The characters need to be identified by script and clear emphasis earlier.

Don't allow the cast to come F.O.H. in costume and makeup either before, during or after the show. Theatre - especially pantomime - is illusion and being sold an ice cream by WD40 destroys that illusion.

The interval was far too long which helped to extend the show to over three hours.

The F.O.H. was a bit disorganised especially during the interval. Is it not possible to move the audience in opposite directions for washrooms, coffees and ice creams? Are there other rooms available?

ONE FRIENDLY WORD OF WARNING

“THUS FAR AND NO FURTHER”

You have a brilliant show which has reached its limit. The wonderful script sails very close to the wind at times and it is very easy for innuendo to go too far in an atmosphere of success. Beware of the temptation of going O.T.T. You hit just about the right balance last night.

IN SUMMARY

I think The Chequers pub may become as famous as the London tea rooms where Samuel Pepys wrote his diaries. Conceived on these licensed premises, “Panto In Space” was beautifully written, staged and presented. The choice of music was inspired and the show from start to finish was wonderfully acted, sung, danced, costumed and lit. I’m running out of superlatives.

Thank you for inviting me. Good luck with “The Crucible”.

John C. Draper, NODA Rep, February 2003