



Society : Putney Light Operatic Society
Production : Beauty & the Beast
Date : Friday January 5th, 2018
Venue : Putney Arts Theatre
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It was a pleasure it was to have visited Putney Light Operatic Society and introduce myself as the new NODA Representative for London District Three. Many thanks to Penny Hughes, for making the necessary arrangements for my visit, and to Sally Bourne for the quick chat on arrival.

Like Marmite, pantomime is something you either love or hate! Personally I love both and as such, it was with a great deal of anticipation that I took my seat. Worryingly, I surveyed a rather thin audience but then, with just a few minutes until ‘curtains up’, the auditorium quickly filled with what turned out to be a very good-natured and highly boisterous adult audience. Given they all seemed know each other I can only assume this was a Friday night outing for another local AM-Dram Society.

Written by Ben Crocker, Beauty and the Beast is a classic pantomime tale. It is the story of a prince who is transformed into a hideous beast as punishment for his cruel and selfish ways, and of a beautiful young woman named Rose (Beauty) whom he imprisons in his castle. In order to become human again, the Beast must earn Beauty’s love before it’s all too late...

Congratulations must go to Marc Batten who, as Director, was responsible for the overall show and its success. It must have been pleasing to see your hard work and effort come together in such a strong overall performance. The entire cast had been very well selected and maintained their believable characterisations at all times. Actual staging worked well and there was no obvious masking or ‘backs to the audience’ whilst speaking. Attention to detail during rehearsals ensured everything ran smoothly with no lengthy delays or distractions.

Congratulations also to Eleanor Warner (Musical Director) on her Panto debut. The selection of quality music provided emotional (When You Believe), humorous (I’ve got you Under My Skin) and great sing-along numbers (We Will Rock You and We Are Family). As a result audience involvement was terrific and the clarity of music and singing were spot on throughout.

Danielle Thompson (Choreographer) and Tyler Thompson (Assistant Choreographer) ensured all dancing and movement were of a very good standard throughout the show. It must have been a challenge to choreograph each number with a unique flavour and to ensure that all cast members were fully engaged and well-rehearsed. The opening number ‘Can’t Stop the Feeling’ gave a great initial impression and ‘set the scene’ for what to expect later on in the show.

This production was well cast and everyone worked hard to create well-rounded characters. The opening number was excellent; it was confidently sung and full of energy. A relatively small cast of ten ensured that all those involved had plenty of ‘stage time’ and opportunity to demonstrate their Panto skills....

Katherine Skene simply shone as Beauty (Rose) and demonstrated not only excellent acting skills but a lovely voice 'When You Believe'. Katherine brought the character of Rose to life and put her own stamp on this by showing her independent spirit in her dealings with Jacques and The Beast. Katherine's concern for her father, and her gradual change of heart towards The Beast, were most touching.

The last time I saw Leon Hernandez performing onstage was when he shone in the role of 'Jack Worthing' (The Importance of Being Earnest). To see him here as the Prince/Beast was such a complete contrast and further evidence of his outstanding acting abilities. I found the lumbering walk, various grunts and growls, together with wig and horns delightfully funny. Leon was confident in his characterisation (Beast/Prince) and consistent in his movements throughout. Another excellent role to add to the long list of stage credits...

Joe Beecroft (Ma/Panto Dame) gave a most accomplished performance interacting with the audience who enjoyed the warmth of character and comedy that he was able to inject throughout the whole show. Complete with a selection of 'over the top' and outrageous costumes, Joe portrayed the Panto Dame beautifully.

Every panto needs a crowd pleasing 'Silly Billy' type to engage the variety of audiences that come to these annual extravaganzas. Enter the irrepressible Philip Ruby who shone in the role of Felix (talking poodle and show narrator). With a naturally funny and endearing demeanor Philip got the audience firmly 'on his side' Philip demonstrated a quick wit and high level of enthusiasm in everything he did.

In the opposite role, Harriet Ruby (Malabelle) was simply superb as the panto's evil witch. Playing up to the audience at every opportunity, Harriet clearly relished her 'baddie' role and gave a performance suitably designed to elicit copious booing whenever she appeared onstage. I was hugely impressed with her ability in dealing with some good-natured audience heckling, and in summarily dismissing these with a sneer and indifferent comment. Well done!

Freddy Bowen stood out, in a quality cast, filling the cameo role of 'Talking Clock'. I simply loved Freddy's interpretation of this character, the body/facial mannerisms used and voice! I only wish that the role had been larger as I found myself anticipating his next action and then laughing at every line or facial expression...

Emily Bowers (Capucine) performed well throughout demonstrating huge amounts of energy, fabulous dancing and a lovely singing voice. Alex Blackie did well in the role of Jacques, Rose's brother and Malabelle's admirer. Katherine Felton (Lamp) and Milena Mironuk (Hat Stand) provided additional furniture in the Beast's castle and both were kept busy in the second act with numerous opportunities to appear onstage.

Distributing glow wrist bands as entering the auditorium was an excellent idea and a bit of extra 'fun' as the audience waved them around during the show. The idea to distribute chocolate coins to the audience was nothing short of inspired! A terrific idea and guaranteed to elicit plenty of audience screams and involvement.

The high quality programme (Thudd Creative) was full of interesting details and there were some great photographs of rehearsals and interesting cast biographies. It was also pleasing to see the 'affiliation to NODA' reference prominently displayed in the show programme. However, I feel it would have been easier for the audience to understand 'who was playing which character and singing what songs' had these been clearly indicated in the programme.

The set design was handled by Philip Ruby and Ben Waterhouse. This proved to be relatively straight forward, and effective, in ensuring minimal delays throughout the show. Focus, instead remained on the cast and it was thus easy to follow the story as it unfolded.

Props were jointly managed by Philip Ruby and Bryan Ruby who successfully kept track of everything and ensured they were all of good quality and appropriate for the time period and setting.

Stage Manager, Ben Waterhouse, ensured everyone, and everything was in the right place at the right time. I did feel that there were a few instances where the music could have continued longer, during changes, which would have given a smoother impression and avoided awkward silences.

Costumes (All Dressed Up) were all of a good standard (particularly liked the Dame outfits) and appropriate for the time period and setting. Make-up was handled by individual cast members and again appeared appropriate.

Lighting was handled by Dixon Cosser and was generally of a consistently good level with all cast members being clearly lit when required.

Sound was handled by DV Performance and everything working well during the show with both speaking and singing generally being clearly audible.

I am sure that the entire audience, like me, left feeling impressed with the quality of all cast members and Putney Light Opera Society in general. This was a most enjoyable performance and evening's entertainment.

I look forward to a long relationship with PLOS and in attending future productions.

Des Wilby
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