



Society : Putney Light Operatic Society
Production : The Emperor's New Clothes
Date : December 22nd, 2018
Venue : Kings College School, Wimbledon
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

With Christmas only three days away it was a pleasure to have visited Putney Light Operatic Society (PLOS) and enjoy their 2018 Panto – ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’. Written by society members Philip Ruby and Joe Beecroft, this recreation of a traditional tale kept to the well-known story line but introduced many unexpected elements into the show.

Congratulations must first go to Paul Dagley who, as Director, ensured the overall success of this panto adaptation. This was a balancing act in meeting both Philip and Joe’s expectations together with those of the audience. Having assembled a quality cast, and coupled with all your hard work and effort, this production certainly ‘came together’ well and is one to look back on fondly.

Kim Schenkelaars must be congratulated as Choreographer for putting together such a fabulous, and varied, array of dance routines for this production. I, like the rest of the audience, was hugely surprised to see so much time and effort had gone into choreographing this panto. Whilst the featured dancers had plenty to do (more on them later) the entire cast got involved, delivered above expectations and definitely added to the show’s appeal.

Michael Searle took on responsibilities as Musical Director and led his small band from behind the main stage area. Whilst this was unfortunate, and due to constraints on space, it had no negative impact on the timing or blending with vocals. Indeed, the cast appeared to have been well-rehearsed and the music never overshadowed those singing.

The action began in a village square and the storyline was quickly set for the panto. Once the royal family had been welcomed, a proclamation was made inviting all those interested to enter a competition and create a new wardrobe for the king...

Alex Johnson delivered a strong performance as the somewhat simple, and definitely vain, Emperor Armani. This was a great role to develop and I thought Alex’s characterisation worked very well indeed. ‘I’m Too Sexy for My Shirt’ was completely unexpected and Alex’s opportunity to not only stretch his vocals but also writhe around the stage whilst dancing. This was a fabulous number and both the costumes and choreography made it so much fun.

Harriet Ruby returned to the panto stage as the Empress Versace which was a complete contrast to last year’s evil Malabelle. Frequently ignored, upstaged or simply forgotten by the king this was a lovely role that gave great scope for both body and facial language. Indeed, the audience quickly came to sympathise with the Empress and the way she was treated by the king. I was delighted Harriet was allowed to demonstrate her wonderful singing voice with ‘Strongest Suit’ being the highlight. Another excellent performance from a versatile, and talented, leading lady.

Alex Blackie delivered an excellent performance as the officious, somewhat bumbling and always pretentious Secretary Philippe Phalop. This was a terrific piece of character acting and Alex proved to be ideally cast for this role. Dressed appropriately with the required pencil moustache and wig, Philippe was at times disliked, loved and pitied by the audience.

Having co-written the show Joe Beecroft gave a wonderful performance as Madame Coco – the obligatory panto dame. Quickly developing his character, and warming himself to the audience, Joe ensured plenty of interaction and delivered a stream of lame jokes to make everyone groan. With suitably excessive makeup, together with various wigs and outrageous costumes, Joe maintained high energy to deliver this ‘over the top’ performance as the loveable Madame Coco.

Leni Pikrodafnis gave a great performance in the challenging role of Prince Calvin. Casting a woman as the leading male romantic role is something that doesn’t always work. On that note, I thought Leni was terrific and certainly managed this well indeed. What was an added bonus turned out to be a truly lovely singing voice! Congratulations on your PLOS debut...

Philip Ruby most definitely delivered as Fred Bare – the completely loveable, excitable and ‘over the top’ son of Madame Coco. Indeed, this was such an ideal role you’d almost think Philip had written it for himself... Huge amounts of energy and non-stop audience interaction this was a fabulous role to play and one Philip clearly enjoyed.

The roles of panto villains, Hoaxem and Coaxem, were well played by Jonathan Whittaker and Penny Hughes. Quickly established their evil characters, Jonathan and Penny were suitably insulting and nasty to the audience eliciting copious boos at every appearance. A special note of recognition must be given to Jonathan for his additional performance as the back end of a panto camel...

Nicky Radford made for a lovely Lily White and again quickly endeared herself to the audience as the unfortunate relation of Hoaxem and Coaxem. Having spent so much time rehearsing for the panto it was sad to see Nicky struggle with throat trouble at the performance stage. Congratulations for continuing – an unfortunate occurrence but fully understandable.

Ailie Donaldson, Gemma Miles, Isobel Snelson, Lauren O’Mara, Zoe Hickman, Aoife Considine, Deborah Lowe, Emma Ollis and Megan Scarff were simply terrific as the featured dancers. From the opening number through to the finale, it was obvious just how much time and effort had been invested here. It must have been great to be so heavily involved and fun to have so many varied dance routines to learn. Precise, polished and with lots of energy onstage - well done to everyone!

Ben Waterhouse, Kathryn Felton, Jamie Wright, Jennifer Taylor and Kob Yeboah provided additional support as ensemble members and are all to be congratulated for their performances.

A vital ingredient of panto is the amount, and frequency, of audience involvement. This was terrific throughout but a number of instances in particular. The distribution of chocolate buttons was a great idea and allowing the kids to play on the stage floor area during the interval worked very well. Inviting them onto stage at the end a lovely touch. What was most impressive was the reactions from several cast members when receiving unexpected screams from various children in the audience. Always well-handled with a suitably funny comment.

Mark Davies handled Set Design which included a relatively simple backdrop and raised plinth. The rest of the stage was left uncluttered allowing for plenty of acting/dancing space, the easy movement of props together with cast entrances and exits.

Sarah Wood brought her experience as Stage Manager to this production and everything appeared to run smoothly with no obvious delays or awkward pauses. Whilst I'm sure there were a few 'moments' backstage, the audience were never distracted with any issues or delays.

Bryan Ruby designed and made some good Props for the show. These were easy to manoeuvre and simply brought onstage when required. It should be noted that the swords used in the fight scene were actually metal with resulting authentic sounds.

Kathryn Felton managed Costumes and gathered a terrific selection which were all of good quality and fun. All principals looked their parts, Coco was always outrageously dressed, and the dancers/ensemble were fabulous and the animals terrific. Both the butterfly costumes and black/white outfits also deserve a mention - simple but very effective.

Dave Gates managed Sound which worked well. All principal actors were individually mic'd resulting in their speaking and singing being clearly audible. Dickson Cosser managed Lighting and again, there were no issues to mention. Credit should be given to both Dave and Dickson for the fact that Sound and Lighting ran smoothly with no technical issues worth mentioning.

Glen Hobbs put together a quality programme that included a lot for the audience to read and enjoy. I always enjoy the cast photos and biogs - it was a lovely touch to include all dancers and ensemble members here. I particularly enjoyed reading the introductory notes from Diana Featherstone and Paul Dagley. As always, it was pleasing to see the prominent NODA reference in the programme.

I would like to suggest that PLOS submit this programme into the **NODA London Poster & Programme Competition 2019**. Simply download the entry form, from the below web link, and submit together with six programmes. Full details are include here:

<https://www.noda.org.uk/regions/london/noda-london-poster-programme-competition-2019>

It only leaves me to say that this was a most enjoyable production and one that certainly delivered on fun and entertainment. Congratulations to everyone at PLOS for another fine production and I look forward to visiting again in 2019.

Des Wilby
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