

Babes in the Wood

(or Trouble at the Palace!)

A pantomime by Peter Webster
Performed in February 1992

'Babes' was a class show

Two things took the Faringdon Community Theatre's pantomime 'Babes in the Wood' beyond normal amateur standards: live music, good singing and an imaginative script. This was a class production. Written by Peter Webster, who co-produced and directed along with Helen Barter, this show even managed without a traditional darne. But you hardly noticed, because the storyline held together so well, and the characters all blended excellently.

It was a pity the plot saw King Eric the Idle and his Queen off on their hols for most of the time. Though it gave the wicked Count Tofifty ('Count to 50 - geddit?') his chance to run the kingdom according to his own evil ways, not to mention giving us the benefit of Ieuan Thomas's own splendid voice, it left us wanting rather more of the tongue-twisting Gilbert and Sullivan-style numbers that 'King' Dave Headey and 'Queen' Jeni Summerfield sang together in such professional style. Roll on the next musical...

The principal boy came in the person of Robin of Locksley, alias Debbie Lock, backed by her band of young and rather impertinent outlaws (Zoe Clarke, Heather Gillies, Claire Holland, Kirk Holland, Penny Lee, Sarah McDougall, Christopher Mumby, Sarah Nutbrown, Andrea Smith, Paul Summerfield, Rachel Wills and Emma Woofford, led by Philip Hurst's Little John, Rory Willett's Friar Tuck and Louise

The nearest we got to a dame-character was Mrs Custard-Pigh, a nurse, played with sound comic gesture and timing by Brenda Keith-Walker. We were treated to another very assured performance from young Jemima Headey, this time as the maid Marian. And the audience quickly adopted as its favourite the princess's dog, played with great vivacity by Louise Benton (sorry, Louise, that I called your character a cat when captioning the photographs in last month's Folly - I only saw you fleetingly during dress rehearsal, and must have had the lens on back to front!).

The prince and princess were charmingly played by Ben Probert and Annabelle Wills, with Joan Lee doing a nice line in witchery and Ruth Willett a homely fairy godmother. The cast was completed by Naomi Whale, Sandra Carter, Matthew Summerfield, Emily Church, Steven Pugh and Anna Mackenzie, with delightful dancing from Claire Green, Sally Heasman, Lisa Moore, Andrea Pargeter, Tane Smith and Christina Willett.

Special thanks to the orchestra: Debra Warner, John Sirrell, Joyce Carter, Rob Pratt, Mandy Woolman and Helen Noyce. And all credit to those responsible for the set: the gingerbread cottage, in particular, was a gem.

I.S.

Butler's Will Scarlett.

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