

Lark Rise

A play by Keith Dewhurst
based on the book by Flora Thompson
Performed in May 1998 at the Faringdon Corn Exchange

An everyday story of Victorian country folk

LARK Rise, the theatrical interpretation by playwright Keith Dewhurst of Flora Thompson's classic memoir of Oxfordshire rural life, is essentially about creating atmosphere.

Right from the word go, when the excellent folk band Jack's Maggot struck up the musical intro, and the delightful voice of Claire Green set the scene, we were transported to that little hamlet where the work is hard, the money hard-come-by, but where the larks always sing - until, that is, the cruel hand of war lays its cold fingers over the very heart of this valiant little community.

The 'action' relies on a series of exquisite tableaux, interweaving the everyday lives of the men in the fields (and in the pub), the women at home, the children hovering uncertainly between the carefree embrace of their rural playground and the all-too-urgent call of work.

Taking on a tremendous logistical challenge by performing Lark Rise as theatre-in-the-round, Faringdon Dramatic Society celebrated its 50th jubilee year with another first class production at the Corn Exchange - different yet again from anything they have tackled before.

The singing was excellent (Adrian Wells lending real weight in this department, to go with a splendid three-handed acting performance), the costumes wonderful, and some of the more instant characterisations spellbinding (Joan Lee as Queenie and Roger Leitch as Twister being particularly memorable).

This play is all about a community, and its production depends upon a sense of community, too, for all those who are involved - whether 'back-stage', aloft on the lighting towers, or performing and playing. Director Dave Headey and his assistant, Carolyn Taylor, must be very proud of their team, both in and out of the spotlight.

So, applause for every individual contribution, but no more names... except to save especial credit for an exceptionally mature performance from young Kathryn Whiffen, as Laura Timms, who together with Tom Woolman playing her brother Edmund, was pivotal to the unfolding of this story of everyday country folk a century ago.

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