

Oxfordshire Drama Network

ODN Review

Faringdon definitely needed the large wide stage of their Junior School to support the very large chorus of children, 52 in number, in this home written show. The enthusiasm of well rehearsed, well disciplined soldiers, fairies, teenage gang and bugs carried this production with its Shakespearian influence. Basically a simple story- Princess runs off with her true love into the Forest of Dreams to avoid marrying into money as demanded by the King. Everybody but everybody chases after her (for the reward of course), risking the wrath of Beron, Tania and the magic of Fairy Putt but finally return to several happy weddings.

The basic set was expertly painted with back and side flats but the mammoth chorus left little room for any other props, even the soldiers had no weapons. The lighting on stage was good but left a few dark corners. We liked the pool of light that trapped players as if in a cage and the UV for the Bugs dance worked very effectively. Costumes were excellent as usual, kitting out all the chorus must have been a huge task, but the overall effect when the stage was full was great. Musically, Cathy Lloyd, the Musical Director, led her live orchestra of 9 in some very apt numbers, we particularly enjoyed 'I'm a Believer' which got our feet tapping. Unfortunately the sound balance was not corrected too well from the overhead microphones. during the recorded musical items and the singing was overwhelmed.

There were no really strong characters on stage and we were carried along by good acting from the several youngsters in the cast, notably Jack Porter as the Army Sergeant and Billie Geehan as the magical fairy Putt. We didn't have a nasty baddie to boo and hiss at though Adrian Wells as the King/ Beron tried hard to establish a commanding character into his dual part. His Queen/ Tania (Katie Dyet) was very quiet by comparison. Alex Oliver as the Princess gave a good performance but her lover Leo (Mary Mountford-Lister) was too wooden and we didn't get a thigh slapping role from her/him as we expected. Tom Kennedy as the Prince gave a competent showing as did our two other heroines Lynsey Kendrick and Miriam Wells as Zee and Anna. It got very confusing as to who wanted to marry who at the beginning. Auntie Bee (Rob Thorpe) did his best as the dame, but was not effective in engaging with the unusually shy audience, not as we expect with traditional Panto. Joe Benson and Karen Whiffen as the comic duo made the most of a script somewhat lacking in comedy for them. Mostly our laughter was saved for the Army General (Tim Gerry) and his young soldiers. If only he had adopted a Capt. Mainwaring style to complement the amusing 'camp' performance of his Major (Luke Gerry). Well done also to Katie Goodwin for overcoming her disability, its not often you see a Chancellor in a wheelchair.

Overall the Midsummer Night's Dream idea didn't really transpose very well into a Panto, somehow we all felt something was missing from the show and so much tradition had got left behind somewhere. However this shouldn't distract from a well presented production- well done kids, your dedication and discipline showed through and carried the Show.