

Oxfordshire Drama Network

ODN Review

Recognising that Panto is not the only Christmas entertainment that is likely to be popular, Faringdon D. S. took on board a chorus of 63 river bankers and wild wonders to back the well known characters of Wind in the Willows.

The logistics of coping with such a large number in make-up — squirrels, hedgehogs, field mice, rabbits — seems a nightmare, but they were so well organised and their entrances/exits on stage in such numbers was well choreographed.

The audience was almost overwhelmed by their enthusiastic choral participation. However, they certainly were not allowed to upstage the main characters Toad, Mole, Ratty and Badger. The costumes were well designed and their accentuated make-up reinforced the well rehearsed characters they portrayed.

Led by Joan Lee as Toad (not quite as ebullient as I would have wished) Ratty and Mole were both expertly played by Cleve Forty and Lois Wells, respectively and a stoic performance from John Taylor as Badger complete a very good team.

Full marks also to Gary Thompson as Chief Weasel for being so nasty, but even I thought he had gone over the top when he selected his supper by literally picking up a dear little sleeping rabbit and carrying it off. No wonder the audience booed. Nightmares are made of this!

The scenery was basic but some wonderful touches brought it to life. The "working" boat, caravan and barge were well worth the effort and Badger's sett so realistic.

Most of the lighting plot was effective, particularly the crescent moon but unfortunately the snowstorm was lost.

Faringdon D.S. are one of the few societies who still maintain live music with their shows and their orchestra was well balanced musically, unobtrusive and very well rehearsed and they certainly enhanced my entertainment.

I only wish the directors had ignored the temptation of introducing panto style audience participation and the finale community song. Just a personal preference folks.

Overall an exceedingly good and very enjoyable production and I am sure all their audiences were very happy with this substitute for the usual panto.

Tony Heath

Oxfordshire Drama Network

Panto Competition 2002/2003

The front of house team were welcoming and friendly to all. The programme was nice and simple; good clear print and nicely laid out.

The director used the whole stage and a few extras with walking through audience and Badgers house. Well done.

The lighting was good and covered well. The camp fire was set off brilliantly by the mood lighting.

The opening number was nice and bright, happy start with good positioning. The stage "vehicles were wonderful and added a real air of professionalism. Other props were well used and adequate.

Ratty was lovely and kept the rat like air all the way through. I would have liked to see him busier at times and a few more mood changes — he was always the same.

Mole was quite delightful and absolutely perfect — I went to a production of Toad at the Swan 2 weeks after Faringdon and Lois knocked spots off that mole — many many congratulations.

I loved otter and son — good costuming. Nice touch.

The baby rabbits and hedgehog coming on between scenes were lovely- but we must teach people to find the light even at this young age.

Uptails all song was very catchy and well performed.

In between scenes, try not to close the curtains — they only slow the action down. It really is not necessary with good lighting techniques.

Toad was lovely — perfect for role — seemed to really love it. I would say that one only makes a 'I' entrance once — so make sure it is a good one_ could have been a bit more oomph! It came later, but would have been better at the beginning too.

Watch positioning in front of the caravan, Ratty was stood right in front of the window most of the audience could see nothing of toad inside.

The horse — what can I say — what a wonderful performance — what timing — fantastic — TOP MARKS

The baddies were aptly dressed and all were suitably nasty — without scaring kids to death. Good performances by Karen and Gary. Good team work by all.

Good effects of moon and stars — not quite so convinced by the snow

Good set changes — slick and did not interfere with the action — so again, curtain not needed with such a good back stage crew.

Pacing by Rat and Toad to caravan exit was good — right feeling of strolling along.

Baby rabbit which was taken — did not move — brilliant- not a flicker- brought tears to my eyes.

All the songs were well done, but occasionally the words were drowned by the wonderful orchestra. Good to have live music. Well done all

Badger was delightful and well played. Nice contrast to other parts.

Engine of car starting to move was a tiny bit late as car had already started to move.

"We could have been anything" was a good number with some fine movement.

The scene where mole was beaten up was again well tackled so as not to be too scary. Well done

Remember when you wear a radio mike where is it? Don't wrap your scarf around it Toad — it does not work so well.

Court scene was a little cluttered — did not seem to be so well staged — a lot of masking of toad. Maybe too many on stage? Not sure — did not quite work.

When Toad came on to his cell he acted the moment he was on view — even if the lights were not on — well done

Gaolers daughter had the best singing voice of the whole pantomime competition. Well done Grace, you were a delight to hear.

Train Drive was great — good mime action — we knew exactly what he was doing all the time. Timing and sound effects were super.

"Shake it like that" nice sound contrast to quiet songs.

The community singing was nice and well done. Good to see sweets handed out and not thrown — this is dangerous and must not happen anymore — I have seen a lantern broken and a cut head.

The finale was delightful and the whole show was very good. I did find this very long and wondered what mums and little children thought.

I was particularly impressed by the chorus discipline- they knew exactly where they should be all the time. Quite an achievement. Well done to you all. Wonderful show Poop! Poop!