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Society : Faringdon Dramatic Society  
Production : Happily ever after...?  
Date : 5<sup>th</sup> February 2016  
Venue : Faringdon Junior School  
Report by : Rob Bertwistle (NODA Rep. District 12)

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## Show Report

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the kind invitation from Katie Dyet your Chairman to attend your seasonal panto production 'Happily ever after...?' I anticipated I was in for a treat and was not disappointed.

FDS really put so much time and effort into their productions and it shows! From the opening chorus to the final curtain there was plenty to entertain and amuse every member of the very enthusiastic and supportive audience.

But firstly may I say a big thank you for the very warm welcome from your Front of House Manager Gary Field. It is always a pleasure to attend an FDS production and become acquainted with more of your members. Now onto the business in hand.

### The Production

This was a well-conceived and highly original take on the traditional Fairy Tale theme with the clever twist being that the fairy tale 'Baddies' took over the story-telling (by stealing the Book of Fairy tales from the Fairy Godmother) and with their 'evil' influence deciding the stories' outcomes they would thence-forth all end 'unhappily ever after'.

Written by two members of the society - Helen Thrower (who also directed) and Verity Roberts this production sparkled with wit, fun and a certain endearing charm. Numerous figures from the realms of 'Fairy Tale Land' appeared before us and each was brought vividly and effectively to life by some striking make-up and bright and colourful costumes. Some hilarious and clever characterisations all added to the fun.

Helen directed with flair and pace and the action hardly slowed except for an occasionally longer scene change. She coaxed some wonderful performances from her large and enthusiastic cast. What particularly struck me was the wide age range of the actors and some of the younger actors' self-assured performances.

Musical Director, Debra Warner kept firm control over her excellent four piece band as well as accompanying on the piano. I liked the choice of songs - all of which moved the story along - with the themes fitting perfectly with the story line.

The principal and chorus singing was tuneful and diction was excellent and *everyone* knew their words. Principal 'mikes' ensured every word was clear and audible so congratulations must go to Gary Bates in charge of sound.

Andrea Smith's choreography was clever and inventive and just right level for the range of talents of the large cast. The steps and movements were well rehearsed and the synchronisation of movement was very good. Everyone knew the routines and the beaming faces were testimony to the fact that everyone was having a thoroughly good time!

Jo Webster's simple yet effective set design enabled scenes to flow relatively smoothly and this was helped by playing some scenes 'front of tabs' while more complicated scene changes were effected behind them.

The lighting design by Ian Chandler gave every scene atmosphere and certainly the general lighting design enhanced the whole production.

The wonderful costumes designed and created by Jeni Summerfield, Lynda Bates and Joan Lee were of a high standard. Each and every character on stage looked very good and all the costumes fitted well. The principal players, I'm sure, were helped to achieve such excellent characterisations by wearing their particular costume.

This was enhanced by the cleverly designed and meticulously applied make-up by Ceri Baker, Becky Brand and Anna Marlow. Congratulations to you all.

### The Cast

There was a very large cast involved in this production (around fifty-five by my reckoning) and it would be quite a task to name each individual member but it was very obvious that everyone was giving their 'all' during the performance. So firstly, many congratulations to *everyone* who took part.

Of course I would be failing in my duty if I did not comment on some of the principal players involved.

Emma Riddle as 'Mother' and Tiffany Jakovljevic as the 'Child' opened the proceedings with a very tuneful and touching rendition of 'Hush-a-bye Mountain'.

Carolyn Taylor was very funny as the ever so posh Fairy Godmother. This was a wonderfully comic performance with really clear diction and that wry smile ever present. She was ably assisted by her team of 'Fairy Apprentices' who all worked very well together.

Joan Lee played Madge - based I think on the Dame Edna Everage character of the same name - with relish. With only a few words to say at the very end this was a wonderful dead pan performance as she trailed around behind the Dame with that care-worn expression. Hilarious!

Duncan Sinclair captured the character of the 'The Dame' very well. There was just the right amount of gentle humour and some lovely audience interactions. This was a relaxed and good natured performance with clear diction and was complimented with an excellent costume and the customary 'Dame' make-up.

I liked Ellie Hickman's Cinderella. Very good stage presence combined with clear diction and wonderful comic timing made this a memorable performance.

Peter Webster as the Big Bad Wolf was very funny. He gave a suitably laid back performance as was befitting the character. Some excellent make-up and a dapper suit completed the effect.

Keeping with the Big Bad Wolf theme – Red Riding Hood played by Kia Howard was also very funny and this young actress gave a very self-assured performance. She used the stage well and had some very amusing facial expressions. Kia just be careful that your diction is as clear as possible as it can sometimes be that nerves or excitement can cause an actor to deliver their lines too quickly.

Dominic Allum and Leo Thrower were excellent as the ‘Rat’ duo. They complimented each other perfectly and gave chirpy and confident performances. Their diction and stage presence was very good.

I really liked Dave Headey’s Genie of the Lamp. This was a fairly brief but most memorable performance. A wonderful costume and make-up created a visually impressive character but Dave’s dead-pan delivery and comic timing together with some hilarious facial expressions made this an outstanding performance. The Liverpoolian accent all added to the fun!

Finally, to round up the line of ‘Goodies’ Jayne Hoyland as Prince Charming, Abby Benson as the Handsome Prince and Roddy Benson, Katrina Naruszewicz, and Tiffany Jakovljevic as the Three Bears all gave good supporting performances.

Jeni Summerfield as the Wicked Witch gave us an excellent over-the-top performance with good stage presence and a very impressive and suitably menacing cackle. I liked your interactions and throw away lines to the audience too. Very funny!

Katie Dyet played the Evil Queen extremely well. There was just the right degree of menace and comic villainy in this performance and Katie obviously had a great time playing this character. She used the stage well and delivery of lines was excellent. An impressive costume and make-up completed this first class characterisation.

Another inspired and hilarious comic pairing were the two Ugly Sisters played by Andrea Smith and Bex Hutchings. These two actresses worked so well together and the delivery of their lines and comic timing was first class. Their rendition of the recent pop classic ‘Don’t ya?’ brought the house down!

Amanda Linstead was an amusingly laid back Pied Piper complete with hippie costume and ‘shades’. This was another well-judged performance although I did have strain to hear all the dialogue at times.

John Goffin as the Ogre, Charlotte Allum – Goldilocks, Matthew Warner as Buttons, Imogen Hunt as Rose Red (not a fairy Tale character I’m familiar with I have to admit) and Debbie Lock as the cleverly executed Magic Mirror all gave good performances and completed the line-up of the ‘Baddies’.

This production had obviously been a long time in the writing, planning and rehearsal phases and the end result was a testament to true team-work. This shows the strengths of any society - when so many people on stage and behind the scenes come together to create such an enjoyable piece of theatre.

May I finally once again thank and congratulate everyone involved with the production and apologies once again for being unable to name everyone, however, your contributions have certainly been noted.

May I wish every member of Faringdon Dramatic Society a somewhat belated Happy New Year and every success with your next production which I hope I shall be fortunate enough to be invited to.

With very best wishes,

Rob

Rob Bertwistle

District 12 Representative

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