



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Faringdon Dramatic Society
Production : Arthur's Adventures (Seasonal Panto)
Date : 3rd February 2017
Venue : Faringdon Junior School
Report by : Rob Bertwistle Regional Rep. (District 12)

Show Report

Many thanks for the kind invitation from your Chairman, Gary Field, to review the latest seasonal offering from Faringdon Dramatic Society – Arthur's Adventures or Merlin to the Rescue! Thanks also for the warm welcome on my arrival from Carolyn Taylor and Amanda Linstead (who also co-directed tonight's performance).

This lively and engaging panto penned by group member (and co-director) Peter Webster had all the familiar ingredients of the traditional panto save for one unusual break with tradition by having a female actor playing the 'dame'. Although this worked perfectly well but I couldn't help but keep wondering when *the* 'Dame' was going to make an appearance.

Bex Massie made a good dame and her character Mrs. Tickleme gave her lots of scope for audience interaction and some hilarious exchanges with other cast members. Bex worked very hard to entertain the relatively small audience present on the night I attended. She had good comic timing and very funny facial expressions which, coupled with some very clear diction, made this a very watchable performance.

Emma Butcher was convincing as Arthur and it was good to see the 'principal boy' tradition being embraced. Emma had a very commanding stage presence and really made the character come to life. Her diction and projection were first rate.

Sarah Couzens as the dizzy yet wise Merlin was spot on. It was quite refreshing to see a female version of the legendary wizard and Sarah obviously had great fun bringing this character to life. She had good diction and used the stage well – never once allowing her character to falter.

Gary Field was suitably laconic as Arthur's guardian and mentor the painfully named Sir Jikal-Trusse. Not a huge part but Gary played it very well and it was quite a departure from recent roles I have seen him in with FDS.

His son Sir Loin was played by Josh Dunn who had incredibly only taken on the part two weeks prior to the run! Apart from one tiny prompt this was a faultless performance and one of which Josh should be suitably proud. Apparently, he has now got 'the bug' so let us hope we see more of this young man in future productions.

Lottie Allum gave an assured performance as Sir Loin's betrothed, Margaret. She gave a dryly comic interpretation of this character using the stage well and interacting amusingly with her 'betrothed'. Lottie had very clear diction and she projected well.

Suzanna Carter gave a wonderfully over-the-top performance as the evil enchantress Morgan Le Fay with lots of evil laughter and echoing tones as she cast her spells on the unfortunate population. This was a very assured and entertaining portrayal with clear spoken and vocal diction and excellent use made of the playing area. One question – how did you manage to maintain your balance in those *extremely* high heels? Suzanna's costume incidentally looked amazing and really enhanced the characterisation.

Dom Allum as her weak and rather cowardly son captured the character very effectively. He used the stage well and diction was good. Dom also interacted amusingly with his rather over bearing mother! A well-rounded performance.

An assorted collection of Knights with the rather excruciating names of Sir Plusse, Sir Reale, Sir Cuitous and Sir Veillance were played by Helen Thrower, Sandra Keen, Verity Roberts and Debbie Lock respectively. This quartet worked well as a team and obviously had great fun with the play on words associated with their names. I liked the way the four of you interacted with each other and fellow players and you all used the stage well and never once dropped out of character. You must have had great fun in rehearsals I think. Well done!

I liked Lynne Puddifoot as Merlin's cantankerous and cynical owl Bubo. She gave the character a real personality and I'm sure that marvellous costume helped with the characterisation. Your diction was particularly good and this was important as you had some very funny lines.

The Dark Knights were short on dialogue but high in menace and the pale face make-up with the heavily darkened eye sockets was very effective indeed. I like the costumes too. The effect of you all dressed in matching black costumes with black boots was very striking. The Knights were played by Kayleigh Booth, Ellie Hickman, Millie Long and Helen Tate who also worked well as a team. The moves in your choreography were well co-ordinated and slickly executed. Congratulations!

Other smaller parts were brought to life by the smallish chorus of enthusiastic and lively children of the company playing a variety of other characters including courtiers, animals and even an automaton. Well done to you all. It was very noticeable that you all knew your words and moves and gave such energy and joy in your performances. I hope you will all continue to be part of this wonderful hobby we call amateur theatre.

Co-directors Amanda Linstead and (writer) Peter Webster had worked hard to give most cast members something to say – particularly the children and it was very gratifying to see the enthusiasm and confidence with which they delivered their lines. The pacing was good and scene changes were managed well. The playing area was used effectively with the tried and tested formula for panto working well here.

Choreography by Debbie Lock, Ellie Hickman and Amanda Linstead was perfectly pitched at every level of cast ability. The moves were simple yet effective and everyone knew exactly what they were doing. But most importantly you were all smiling!! Well done!

Jayne Hoyland kept the small but well-balanced band under firm control and the musicians never overshadowed the solo or ensemble singing. Some of the choice of songs were, I felt, rather obscure and didn't always seem to add to the narrative but that could be possibly because of my advancing years!!

Jo Webster's set was simple yet functional and allowed for easy and quick scene changes although the major ones were carried out behind closed tabs while 'fill in' scenes took place in front of them. I liked the idea of back cloths being suspended from hooks to enable fairly quick changes and this is an idea I have seen in a number of smaller venues recently where space can be at a premium. The set painting was of a very high standard and the free standing 'dungeon' and 'Merlin's Hut' sets worked well.

Props manager Ceri Baker had been kept very busy in this production I think as there were numerous props and set 'furniture' which all added to the effectiveness of the piece. Merlin's table of 'Spell' ingredients alone was quite something to behold!

The make-up, designed and created by Jessica Biggs, Anna Marlow and Lyn Waugh was particularly good. As mentioned above there were some striking examples of very exciting and effective make-up.

The costumes by Lynda Bates, Joan Lee and Jenni Summerfield were also very effective and looked very much in keeping with the 'medieval' style of the production. The animal costumes for the children were very good and hours of hard work must have gone into the making of these colourful and realistic-looking costumes. Well done!

The lighting design by Ian Chandler and operated by Tim and Paul Mountford-Lister was good and certainly added atmosphere to the proceedings. This was particularly effective in the dramatic use of lighting in the closing scene of Act one in Merlin's hut.

Sound by Gary Bates and Steve Greening worked well although I felt the mikes were under-used particularly in some of the dialogue which unfortunately was lost. The echo-effect for Morgan's spell casting was very effective.

This was a wonderful and entertaining evening and the 'community feel' of the production was very much in evidence.

Thank you all once again and I look forward to hopefully being invited to your next production.

With best wishes as always,

Rob

Rob Bertwistle

District 12 Representative

NODA

London