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Society : Faringdon Dramatic Society (FDS)
Production : Faringdon Follies – A Celebration
Date : 13th June 2018
Venue : Buscot Park Theatre
Report by : Rob Bertwistle Regional Rep. District 12

Show Report

Many thanks to your Chairman Gary Field for the kind invitation to review this latest totally unique and interesting offering from Faringdon Dramatic Society, *Faringdon Follies – A Celebration*.

This home-grown production featuring key moments in Faringdon's history dating back 800 years to the granting of the town's market charter and also marking the 70th anniversary of the forming of FDS was a time-machine roller coaster ride of potted histories, songs, anecdotes and a visual feast of costumes and photographs. (Though no originals from the granting of the charter!)

The cast:

Now this was where I think the Directors were testing my powers of observation (or recall) because the programme only listed the cast members' names with no character references as to who they were playing - so, in no particular order and with apologies to anyone I have missed out (or mis-cast!) here are my cast impressions. Many cast members appeared in various roles but here are my thoughts on some assorted 'highlights'.

Jo Webster as the 'production co-ordinator' was suitably bossy and business-like with some good comic touches.

Verity Roberts appeared to good effect in several guises but notably as a work house wretch and in the closing seconds of the production - a Rapper!!

Jeni Summerfield was the much put upon and well-meaning costume co-ordinator (as well as having credit in the real programme) assisted by Joan Lee (also credited in the actual programme) who also made a brief appearance, amongst many, in a pink pigeon costume (I think this is where I write – 'Don't ask!')

Peter Webster had fun as the flamboyant and accomplished writer, painter and composer and the former owner of Faringdon House Gerald Tyrwhitt-Wilson, the 14th Baron Berners.

Martin Waymark made an impressive Salvador Dali complete with trade mark moustache.

Janie Eyre-Brook as the wonderfully eccentric and flame haired Marchesa Luisa Casati.

Duncan Sinclair got to show off his acting as well as musical skills at the piano. I liked his interpretation of the great Noel Coward and his rendition of Coward's *Mad about the boy* was most moving.

Adrian Wells made an impressive Cromwell while Jack Metcalfe and Richard Lock gave strong support in that sequence.

Helen Thrower made a beguiling if rather hard hearted Victorian lady as she sang of the fate of a work house wretch.

Strong support in a range of guises was provided by Jan Crowdson, Jacob Bayliss, Matthew Warner, Carole Tappenden and Alison Morris.

Directors:

Not only written and devised by two talented ladies of the company Debbie Lock and Carolyn Taylor but this intriguing blend of drama, song, poetry and projected images was also directed by them to great effect. The ideas were cleverly put across through the ingenious device of 'production meetings' and back stage activities of the actual group telling the history and background to the Faringdon Market Charter marking its 800th anniversary to the present day. This was also a vehicle for marking a very respectable 70 years since the formation of Faringdon Dramatic Society. The various scenes, playlets and vignettes flowed well and were cleverly linked by 'informal' chats between the members of the society. My one little niggle was that the *Memories of the Folly* sequence was read from hand held pieces of paper and it wasn't quite clear who's memory it was. Perhaps having one member of the cast 'introducing' the characters and their memories might have worked to give more clarity and speaking from memory may have highlighted the poignancy of them. But as I said – just a tiny observation in a very well thought out - and thought provoking - evening's entertainment.

Stage management:

Derek Crowdson the stage manager ensured that everything flowed smoothly with no noticeable hitches and I have to say the tiny stage could have proved challenging in this multifaceted production but the company coped admirably with the rather (very?) limited space. I did like the use of various entrances and especially the centre stage entrance which was used very inventively.

Set Design:

The simple set design by Peter Webster which was basically an 'undressed' stage worked well as various props and pieces of furniture were used to create the 'mood' and sense of place. The projected images with Dave Headey in charge all appeared on cue. I was impressed by Tom Woodward's interesting and moodily shot film of Faringdon Folly.

Lighting /Sound:

Lighting and sound by Steve Greening and Gary Bates also were used effectively to create atmosphere and certainly made the scenes much more interesting and entertaining.

Props:

No programme credit for props but there were certainly quite a few - notably some jars of bubble blowing mixture which provided much amusement on and off the stage!

Make-up and Hair:

Again no programme credits for responsibility for these two important areas of the production but everyone looked fine and the make-up had been applied well. However, I must single out here the make-up and hair for the 'Marchesa' which was particularly outstanding.

Costumes:

Costumes by Jeni Summerfield and Joan Lee all worked well and were suitable for the 'moment'. I was very impressed by the hooded monks' costumes which made a very brief appearance in one sequence.

Programme:

The programme by Dave Headey was informative and gave some interesting production 'background'

Finally, thank you to all involved with this most entertaining piece of theatre and congratulation to everyone for having the splendid vision of doing something different. All your efforts and hard work certainly paid off.

I found some of the references to Faringdon House and the town (including the Folly) so interesting that I have been doing a lot of 'Googling' in the last few days – when a piece of theatre makes you do that you know it was good!!

I look forward to hopefully being invited to your next production.

With very best wishes,

Rob

Rob Bertwistle

Regional Representative District 12

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