

Society : Faringdon Dramatic Society
Production : The Snow Queen – A Winter’s Tale
Date : January 31st 2015
Venue : Faringdon Junior School, Faringdon, Oxon.
Report by : Rob Bertwistle

[Show Report](#)

I was very pleased to accept the kind invitation from Faringdon Dramatic Society’s Chairperson, Katie Dyet to review their latest production – ‘The Snow Queen, A Winter’s Tale’.

The plunging outside temperatures of a late January evening were echoed on entering the auditorium by a wonderful atmospherically ‘dressed’ front of tabs depiction of a winter landscape – complete with a very realistic looking snowman!

I was welcomed by Carolyn Taylor, one of the friendly front of house team, and the production’s author and co-director, Peter Webster. This well- known ‘dark’ Fairy Tale, from the original by Hans Christian Anderson, had been given some ingenious and unusual elements, as Peter explained before the performance.

This production was a curious mix of pantomime and melodrama which the enthusiastic cast embraced fully.

The opening was very effective with a full chorus song, and simply choreographed, routine. The stage had been extended forward with rostra and steps and this created a very pleasing ‘3-D’ effect which was heightened by the chorus positioning on the stage in their vibrant ‘townsfolk’ costumes. The use of the playing area was good and differing levels were used to great effect. The whole production looked good with some eye catching sets, clever lighting effects and well produced ‘live’ music and sound.

The cast:

This was obviously very much a team effort and this shone through all the performances.

The ‘anti-heroine’ of the title was played with relish by Amanda Linstead who had a wonderful time being the ‘baddie’! Good characterisation, diction and stage presence made this a winning performance.

Katie Dyet and Verity Roberts played her ‘henchwomen’ to great effect – working well as a comic pair –though I did think they could maybe have matched their mistress’s evilness a little more! Their make-up was very good giving them a sinister and dramatic look which I’m sure helped with the characterisation.

Seb Allum had fun as the 'oh so nice' market trader and hero of the piece, Carlo. I liked the change from 'goodie' to 'baddie' when sprinkled with the mirror dust. Seb had a good singing voice and used the stage well resulting in a nicely rounded performance with clear diction.

Helen Thrower was very good as Carlo's nagging, over-bearing and possessive mother, Nelly. I liked the characterisation and there was some excellent comic timing in the performance – again with clear diction and a good singing voice.

Gloria – the object of Carlo's affections – was played well by Andrea Smith. This was a spirited performance with good stage presence and a strong singing voice. Andrea moved well around the stage and had just a brief moment to show off her balletic skills in Act 2.

Eleanor the Sun Queen was wonderfully under-played by Yvonne Kelly. The character's measured and calm dialogue was in nice contrast to her wicked sister the Snow Queen. I liked the characterisation with good stage presence and clear speaking voice.

The Raven, a small but important cameo role, was played effectively by Dominic Allum. He captured well the sly and slightly 'creepy' personality of the Raven, helped no doubt by an excellent costume.

Pinocchio and his 'creator/father' were played by Joseph Armer and Sean Hodgson respectively. These two actors made a perfect comedy duo. This was a small cameo performance from both actors but a memorable one without a doubt. Joseph's transformation from innocent puppet Pinocchio to truculent teenager (after the administration of the magic mirror dust) was hilarious. Sean proved a good 'foil' to his newly wayward 'son'!

Christa – a robber girl was played well by Kiannah Naruszewicz. Good stage presence but try to make sure the volume is always maintained.

Ellie Hickman and Eve Warner were well paired as Cinderella and Prince Charming – again, turning from sweet and sugary characters to objectionable and fairly unpleasant ones! I felt you both created some very amusing characterisations.

The final couple to succumb to the magic mirror dust and have a change of personality were the well known Fairy Tale characters of Peter Pan and Wendy played by Leo Thrower and Lottie Allum. This was another very amusing 'transformation' with good interaction between the two young actors.

I liked the combined performances of the 'Ice Elves'. This group of young actors all worked well as a team and interacted very effectively on stage. The costumes and make-up also made the group visually exciting.

The Roses and Robbers too worked well together and although the parts were quite small they made a strong impression none-the-less. Well done to all of you!

The chorus of 'customers' and 'townsfolk' were well disciplined and in character all the time. Entrances and exits were made smoothly and even the odd 'one-liners' were perfectly audible. It's

very nice to see when every member of the chorus is focused and really giving it their all!
Congratulations everyone!

Co-director and author Peter Webster (with fellow co-director Sandra Keen) had assembled a lively and committed group of actors who I believe made his 'vision' come to life. There were some memorable performances with some strong characterisations. The playing area was largely used well and the whole production seemed to flow easily from scene to scene. However, there were instances when the action 'flagged' a little – mainly due to not picking up cues quickly enough. Pace is so important in order to keep an audience's attention. It can also give (probably wrongly) an impression that the lines are not secure.

Ellie Hickman and Andrea Smith's choreography was simple but very effective and really added to the over-all effect of the piece.

Musical Director, Debra Warner, ably assisted by Jayne Hoyland, kept a firm hand over her talented 'live' band. The music was balanced well and never over-shadowed the soloists. I was impressed that so many fairly difficult songs and arrangements came over very successfully.

The sound design by Gary Bates was excellent with the radio mics giving just the right amount of support to soloists.

The lighting, by Ian Chandler and Paul and Tim Mountford-Lister was very good and was used to great effect to create various moods. The cloud cyclorama was particularly effective!

The props by Ceri Baker were all in keeping with the piece and handled well by the cast.

Costumes and make-up were first class. The team responsible for these two very important aspects of the production had worked very hard which was evident in the wonderful costumes (which I assume were all made specially as there were no 'hire' credits in the programme), and the very elaborate and well applied make-up.

Jo Webster is credited with set design and what a very impressive finished article it was too! Simple yet so atmospheric with the appearance of an icy landscape one moment to the village market place the next. I liked the use of 'real' trees which looked so authentic in the context of the out-door theme. May I congratulate all who had a hand in the construction and 'dressing' of the set. I hope pictures were taken for future reference!

The programme design by Dave Heady was clear and informative with some interesting cast biographies with accompanying photographs. It is always nice to know a little about the actors who will be performing.

Finally, may I offer my thanks to the front of house team and to all those involved in this most enjoyable evening's entertainment. May I apologise to those not named individually but your invaluable contribution has been noted.

It just remains for me to wish Faringdon Dramatic Society every success with future productions though I note your next production will be from an exchange group – Garrison Little Theatre – performing the comedy ‘Office Hours’ by Norman Foster. This sounds like an exciting and interesting collaboration and I wish you all every success.

Rob Bertwistle

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