



National Operatic & Dramatic Association

London Area Report

My thanks to RACHEL for the invitation to review your latest production. I was met by DEBBIE LOCK - who was very calm, considering the work which had to be done by so many folk in preparing the sixty seven children in the cast, before curtain up at 7.30p.m. I have said in the past, that your Society has a true 'Community Spirit', and this was certainly the case for this production with so many youngsters involved, and hopefully, more people will support the production. With such a large cast, it would be impossible for me to single out each individual character, so, much of the report will be general remarks.

DIRECTORS - DEBBIE LOCK and CAROLYN TAYLOR are to be congratulated on instilling such discipline into such a large cast, I'm sure they had a lot of support from other adults in the cast. Faringdon Community College stage fitted the bill for such a production; having such a wide stage to work on, and the opening chorus number was spectacular, when we saw so many animals appear to sing the opening number. As there were so many people on stage, I would have liked to have seen more use made of 'the built on ' stage, below the main one. During some of the 'big numbers' - animals could have been placed in 'groups' about the stage. This would have 'broken up' so many of the straight lines that we saw during the show. It may have been done in straight lines for a good reason - but the visual effect I think would have been better in 'family groups' e.g. Hedgehogs, Rabbits etc. The main principals worked well together, however at times, the pace dropped off - some of the dialogue was not crisp and sharp enough. A good tip maybe to get groups of principals who may have a lot to say together, to sit in a circle during early rehearsal times and go through the lib at a brisk pace this helps the continuity of parts of a play.

TOAD - played by JOAN LEE; kept up her character throughout. Good clear diction, ;7i t~i—very good make-up. She also kept up her mannerisms throughout, and eye contact was good. Some of the duets with mole were sung in harmony, but unfortunately we could not hear the words clearly.

MOLE - LOIS WELLS. Played the part well, and was sympathetic towards Toad.

RAT - CLEVE FORTY. Looked good, and sang well with clear diction. Made good use or rowing the boat - I wish we would have had some 'sound effects' when they arrived back at Ratty's house. We did have the sound of water later on - but not when Mole nearly capsized the boat.

BADGER - JOHN TAYLOR. Good, strong voice, with excellent make-up. I would have liked to have seen hand make-up for many of the cast, especially for principals - hands are so important, and should look as if they've been made up in character. The contrast and rivalry between Ratty and Badger for Toad came over very well.

ALBERT - JO WEBSTER. This is a gem of a part. Albert had the sympathy of everyone in the audience. Good diction, excellent facial expressions, and really got into character. Well done.

CHIEF WEASEL - GARY THOMPSON- WEASEL NORMAN - KAREN WHIFFEN. Looked the part and delivered their lines well. However, I would have liked to have seen them wear dark glasses, hunch their shoulders on occasions, look around more and be more menacing; and I would have liked to have seen Weasel Norman's hair tucked up under her hat. This also applied to the other weasels. Variation was also required as to how they made their entrances and exits, not just straight on and straight off!!.

WASHERWOMAN - ROGER LEITCH; entered into the spirit of the part, and seemed to have enjoyed the character.

BARGEWOMAN - CLAIRE FORTY; came over well, and seemed to enjoy the role. I would have liked her to have had 'rosy cheeks' to indicate the 'outdoor' life, and perhaps, smoking a clay pipe.

TRAIN DRIVER - DAVE HEADEY; did all that was asked of him. Perhaps his face could have looked a little dirtier on a steam train - and there was no evidence of dirt on his hands!

FOX - ALEX OLIVER. Looked good, I would have liked to have seen a sly expression at times, instead of a broad smile.

The other principals all contributed to the smooth running of the production, namely
MAGISTRATE/GYPSY - KATIE DYET; OTTER/RUPERT - NICK COARD;
PORTLY - GEORGE MORTON; MONICA - KATHRYN WHIFFEN;
GAOLER'S DAUGHTER - GRACE ANDERSON; MAGISTRATE'S CLERK - CAROLE TAPPENDEN.

In the opening of Act 2 I was very impressed by GRACE ANDERSON singing 'Wouldn't it be lovely'. She had a very pleasant voice to listen to, and I'm sure she will do well in the future; you had excellent stage presence. Well done.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR - KAREN PRICE; had her orchestra well in control - it was pleasing to see so many young people playing, I think I counted seven. Well done, to all of you. One of the problems when the M.D. is playing an instrument (piano) and not conducting - it is difficult to keep a balance between orchestra and singers. There were times when the orchestra was too loud for the singers; it was difficult to pick up their words on stage. Otherwise the tone and balance of the players was good.

There were many people involved behind the scenes. These people are just as important as those in front of the lights. Team effort on and off the stage is so important for the success of any production. At Faringdon you seem to have this blend.

I liked the SET DESIGN of KATE LORD, and the set construction of all those who helped, and the SET ARTWORK of REBECCA FULTON. I particularly liked the tree behind Badger's house, and the well constructed boat, car, and barge. The set was well lit by IAN CHANDLER, and the effect looked good on the backcloth, e.g. looking at the clear sky and new moon. There were a few occasions when some principals were not fully lit e.g. in Badger's house.

The WARDROBE was in the capable hands of SHARON GERRY, JOAN LEE, and JENI SUMMERFIELD; a lot of hard work had been done in the forward planning, and making of costumes. Were any of them from professional costumiers? Congratulations to all of you, including those helpers who were drafted in, as mentioned in the programme.

The PROGRAMME by DAVE HEADEY was simple, clear, and had all the information relative to the show. It was interesting to read some of the delights of Alan Bennett's script in stage directions.

I do like to see FRONT of HOUSE STAFF dressed for the occasion; displaying any N.O.D.A. Long Service Awards those individual's have received. This was the case on Thursday evening, so may I congratulate FRONT of HOUSE COORDINATOR - DENISE MONK; who may have been responsible for this course of action. The first people the audience meet are Front of House, and the tone of the evening is set from then on. First impressions are in my opinion, important.

Your Society once again provided good entertainment to the people of Faringdon and District, and long may it continue. I now look forward to your production (outdoors) in June. I hope the weather shines on you.

Gareth Jeremy.

Region 12.

NODA LONDON For Services to Amateur Theatre