

FARINGDON DRAMATIC SOCIETY

WISHING ON A STAR

by Verity Roberts & Helen Thrower-

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As this was a new pantomime, there were no preconceived ideas of the storyline. Even though there were three separate quests to find the 'Star', these were intermingled, but didn't get confused.

The prologue with the witches was beautifully(!?) portrayed by Scooby Carter, Millie Green and Janie Eyre-Brook set the scene and explained their search for the Star to regain their youthful charms. This happened only once in a hundred years and it showed.

The opening with the chorus singing and dancing was well handled and from it emerged Kristian (Abby Benson) who wished to win over the heart of local maid, Louisa (Millie Long). She was less than enthusiastic about Kristian and that he could only have her hand in marriage, if he brought her the Star, which had just fallen to earth. Despite Kristian's excellent singing voice, to which we were treated several times throughout the show, even conquering some difficult contemporary songs, he did not win her hand. This was regardless of severe warnings from his mother, Dame Ariel Bucket, played by the brilliant Sara Varnom, who decides to accompany Kristian on his quest to find the Star. Her comedic timing was a joy to behold. From the midst of the chorus the Galaxy Minstrels, led by Jayne Hoyland kept thrusting their unwelcome presence into all sorts of situations.

The witches kept popping up in a variety of guises, ably supported by the long-suffering Malarkey (Byron Pound) and the Imps. The Star (Andrea Bond) falls to earth, but not in the right place, which is the cue for all parties to start the hunt.

The third party to the Star quest is the court of the ailing King Goddard (and his three warring sons). There, is turmoil because of the impending loss of the kingdom unless they can get the Star to marry the eldest son, Fitzroy, who was played with nauseous petulance by Jacob Bayliss, in all his dealings with his siblings and, later, the hapless Kristian. Having passed the fearsome Dragon's Cave, all encounter the friendly Welsh Dragon and her dancing Draglets, who performed an accomplished dance

routine. By this time Kristian has fallen madly in love with the Star who accompanies them on their journey to the castle.

All three search parties come together in the Starving Crow Inn, a scene which was very effective and superbly directed, with a large number of cast members to marshal. The obvious song 'Master of the House' was skilfully delivered by Duncan Sinclair (a man of many parts) and Helen Thrower. At this point, Prince Fitzroy and Kristian lose the Star, who is captured by the witches, after performing a brilliant routine for the assembled company and luring them into a trance.

All meet up again in the castle and the Star is released and agrees to marry Kristian, much to the chagrin of Prince Fitzroy. The main problem is that he is not of noble birth, but Dame Ariel reveals that she is not, in fact, his mother, but found him in a basket by the river, with a royal ring in the blankets. (shades of Moses here) The King recognises the ring and reveals that Kristian is his long-lost son and, therefore, is the eldest prince and entitled to marry the Star, save the kingdom and all live happily ever after.

The choice of some of very modern tricky songs didn't quite work, as they are not easy to grasp. Others worked well. The choice of 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' as the audience song fell a bit flat and there could have been more audience participation. The live band were particularly good and did not drown out the singers. Sound was a bit variable in places meaning that we could not always hear the songs. The lighting was very effective, and the scenes were well portrayed. All round, this was a brilliant show, reflecting the hard work of all involved. Congratulations.

Nigel James ODN