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theatre

Society : New Stagers
Production : Puss in Boots
Date : 23rd January 2016
Venue : St Anne's Hall
Report by : Tony Sweeney

Show Report

General

A traditional panto delivered with tongues planted firmly in cheek brightened up the winter gloom, giving us all a great night's entertainment. A series of strong characters which drew heavily on panto stereotypes worked well together in a real ensemble piece. I always feel panto season is the chance for groups to just revel in the sheer joy of performance and deliver the unusual and the fantastic whilst clearly having a good time doing it.

We were treated to some excellent puppet work, which again added to the show's impact.

The New Stagers panto is very much a staple of the local area and it was disappointing that the hall was not sold out. I put it down to a wet Saturday night and the fact that it was nearly a month after Christmas when perhaps it might have been more popular whilst the festive season was still in the air.

Players

Keith Barnes (Mrs. Mimi Miller) yet again gave us a masterclass as the Dame; he really has made the role his own, delivering an excellent example of the iconic comic art form. Some clever and witty comedy banter added to the feel of fun that ran through the whole show.

Abby Freeman (Colin Miller) as the principle boy played the part well, giving the feel of a shy and rather sheltered lad who blossoms when he meets the princess. A good stage presence along with a well defined character added to the overall show.

Christine Peirson (Puss) gave an outstanding and striking performance full of character and aided by fantastic make-up and an iconic costume. She was clearly very relaxed and comfortable in the role and this beamed out, making it a solid base for the rest of the show. It can sometimes be difficult to give a panto part real credibility - indeed the whole premise works against it, but she managed it.

Joanna Dodd (Holly Miller) and Matilda Childs (Ivy Miller) as the daughters who inherit their father's mill and then turn on their mother, gave an interesting twist to the roles. Being more simple than sinister and speaking in rhyming couplets added a slightly different feel to the traditional bad guys.

Vanessa Marchant (Snitch the Witch) aided by make-up and a costume reminiscent of the witch in Wicked was clearly the villain from the moment she stepped on stage and she drew boos from the off. Great movement and body language reinforced the villainy.

Ben Ellis (The King) as the rather simple King was again good in the role. A very regal costume complete with crown left you in no doubt who he was.

Christina Myers (Princess Rosamund) was again very regal. In another striking costume she glided on stage, emphasising the role perfectly. Her interactions with the principle boy were spot on.

Lloyd Smith (Fumes) had something of the Igor about him as the wizard's servant. The interchange when opening the door was done very well allowing him to project the character well.

Paul Johnson (Oofledinkums) as the Wizard was aided by some interesting make-up and an iconic costume and he really got into the role. His height added to the effect and some over the top acting was just right for the role.

Director

Paul Johnson has developed a real pedigree in writing and directing panto and it is clear this is something he excels in. His understanding of the origins of the story comes across and allows him to really deliver a traditional panto which audiences not only love, but also expect.

Stage Management

With such a small stage the stage management has to be well worked out to give the maximum impact and this was the case. All the exits and entrances were crisp and this allowed the show to flow at a good pace. The slow motion chase scene was again a masterpiece of theatrical art.

Sound

The sound was clear and audible. Having performed in the hall for many years the group have clearly learned to cope with this aspect without the use of mics.

Lighting

Some atmospheric lighting effects added to the impact and helped raise tension. A simple rig was used well to give maximum effect.

Make-up

The make up was well worked out for each character with the dame, the cat and the witch being extremely striking, which was vital to help define their characters. The other characters needed more subtle make-up, which again worked well.

Set Design

A simple set, which was required to transform a small stage into a number of scenarios. The use of all areas of the stage and the auditorium gave wider options and helped everyone get into the spirit of the evening.

Props

The props were used well and were to hand. The use of a stairgate to deliver the opening gag was a good example.

Costumes

The costumes not only helped define the characters on show, but were all typical of the panto style, being both functional and well thought out. The cat and witch costumes in particular were perfect for the parts. The array of over the top dresses for the dame was also excellent and instrumental in setting the comedic scene.

Programme

The programme was a simple affair which covered the basics. An interesting article on the history of Puss in Boots adding to the audience's experience. I thought the links to Shrek were both informative and showed that nothing ever comes out of a vacuum.

Front of House

As always the front of house members were an integral part of the show, making the audience feel welcome and helping build and reinforce the community feel this group has always enjoyed. They dealt with everyone in a fair and courteous way and this helped start the evening on the right foot.

Tony Sweeney
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