

Critique of Rotherfield Players Panto-Jack and the Beanstalk

After three years absence, audiences were eager and ready for the return of the Rotherfield Players Annual Pantomime, in the form of Jack and the Beanstalk....and didn't we get a treat!

From the overture and the panto's theme music from Shrek ,to the finale, we romped through a delightful production where both performers and audience egged each other on and showed no inhibitions at all, much to the delight, I am sure, of seasoned director, James Gallifant, famed of course for his own legendary 'Dames' in pantos of yore!

What a great team he gathered round him; experienced musicians under the baton of Anna Thompson, with musical numbers brilliantly selected by Barry Shyvers, the combination of digital and live music worked very well; the choreography under the expert toes of Victoria Field, lifted the show to new heights. Victoria also doubled up as the fairy, in a blast of colour and glitter, letting her magic work on all.

The set was once again under the constructive genius of Mark Tasker with dad, David, to assist; the scene backdrops were very detailed and colourful and everything backstage was seamlessly brought together by Stage Manager, Mark Simmonds and his stage crew. Lighting and sound can make or break a show and here it absolutely enhanced everything happening on stage.

Now to the cast!

From rugby pitch to the 'Dame', Mark Rosier had a few 'scrums' on stage and 'tries' at getting us laughing at his corny jokes and daft antics and did so brilliantly. Well over the top in every way, I wonder what Mark's rugby friends thought of this stellar performance?

One would never have thought from reading the opening page of the programme, that Robert Chesterton didn't find pantomime interesting! He was a natural as 'Grabbit', the evil sorcerer, going about his dastardly business of trying to stop Jack from reaching his destiny. The voice, facial expressions and asides were timed to perfection and he knew how to get loads of 'boos' from the audience!

Speaking of 'Jack', what a find the Players have in Ailsa Clark, hot over the

border from Scotland; great voice, deportment, thigh-slapping technique and climbing skills up that beanstalk. What a hero!

Another find for the Players is Angela Barolsky, only joining the cast a few months ago from 'Down Under' and terrific in the role of 'Simon', simple but lovable, always getting things wrong and...wearing no underwear! This revelation as sung in Simon's first entrance, was one of the highlights of the show. Angela's stage presence was terrific and she certainly knew how to engage the audience.

How special to see Molly Dolding so confident and spirited as the Princess after her many years in training in smaller parts including half of a cow! She followed in the footsteps of her sister, Georgie, but giving her own sweet, if a bit saucy performance, after any Tom, Dick or Harry who came along but then firmly getting her hands on our hero, Jack.

The comedy duo, 'Slick' and 'Slack' under the evil spell of Grabbit, but constantly getting his orders wrong, were deftly played by Ellie Hardy and Gussy Morley, with great timing and silly antics.

Graham Carpenter as the 'King' and Simon Broderick- Ward as the 'Giant', the latter doubling up in the ensemble, both added to the fun and enjoyment of the show. Another of the highlights was the appearance of the Giant, seven feet tall and clothed in a brilliant costume which Robert Chesterton started making months ago. I feel sure there will be calls from other societies to borrow it in the future!

But the star (maybe I should say, stars) of the panto for me was definitely 'Daisy', the cow, quite bovinely played by Hatty Philips and, the udder one, Emma Pither. Great manoeuvring, wiggle dancing, and pulling at our heart strings. A Friesen par excellence! 'We love you Daisy' was sung by the audience with gusto.

No production is successful without a great ensemble, and this was no exception. I always make a point of watching the attentiveness and concentration of those without many lines. The troupe danced and sang with

skill, energy and enthusiasm. Another show highlight was the scene in the clouds when suddenly an EasyJet jet flew by with a very dapper pilot on board!

A big shout for the costume team; fabulous outfits were created, bright and colourful and absolutely right for each character. I quite marvelled at the way the dame was able to dance, bend up and down and twirl in her hooped dress! All set off by excellent make up by Bea Campbell.

Let's not forget the prompt, hidden away from all but so important to the smooth delivery of lines and confidence of the cast.

It is always a pleasure to come into the hall to a warm welcome and a smile from the Front of House Staff, as it gets you into the mood for a good evening ahead. So many thanks to Judith Hardy and her team as well as to the bar staff led by Dan Shaw. What a great idea it was to have ice-creams at the interval and very nice ones at that!

As you can read, I loved the production, mostly because of the 'light' touch and the fun everyone was having. Congratulations to all involved for the hard work, commitment and very high standard throughout. You gave us the chance to let our hair down, sing, shout and be merry! Thank you!

Jo Evans