



Be inspired by amateur theatre

National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

Society : Riverside Players
Production : **Old Mother Hubbard**
Date : Friday 1st December 2023
Venue : Old Windsor Memorial Hall
Report by : Nick Humby

Show Report

Overall Production Impression

Riverside Players are very fortunate to have a creative leadership that is brave enough to write their own script for the society and their latest production of Old Mother Hubbard delivers a fresh take that cleverly weaves familiar children's nursery rhymes with some classic traditional pantomime business into a very polished production. All our favourite nursery characters are there from Little Bo Peep, Little Miss Muffet, Jack Horner, Jack and Jill to Little Boy Blue with the Dame, Old Mother Hubbard looking after many.

The society is fortunate to have a very good group of young performers who executed their roles with great confidence, good comic timing and lovely voices. The more experienced performers delivered updated versions of classic pantomime routines including the baking scene, the schoolroom sketch, If I were not upon the stage , Mr Who Mr What and Mr Idontknow and the ghosts bench scene to very good effect.

The whole production was well staged with good tumbler cloths and sets, attractive lighting, an excellent sound mix of prerecorded tracks and live vocals and some attractive costumes with some simple but well drilled choreography. This was a fun show full of saucy innuendo and very old jokes that made the audience groan in recognition but none the less enjoyable to hear again. A perfect first pantomime outing for any young child and their parents.



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Cast

It is lovely to see many of the cast returning from last years show and building on their experience and that sense of a community of like-minded performers is one of the great joys of amateur theatre. Long may it be nurtured here.

Jessica Davies was absolutely delightful as Little Miss Melody Muffett demonstrating some good acting skills with well-judged reactions to other characters and a confident clear voice. She established herself as the Principal Girl from the start addressing the audience and handled the broken-hearted exit well in Act 2. She led the *I wanna dance with somebody* dance routine with charm. A very good young actress.

Vicki Arnold's Fairy Berry was outstanding looking every bit like the fairy on top of the tree and a wonderful contrast between the lyrical dainty Fairy and the disgruntled "past it" actress. She embodied the spirit of both and delivered her lines with zest and precision. The business on top of the ladder at start of Act 2 was excellent providing a fresh surprise that perfectly reflected both characters. To top it all she moved with elegance and sang with a strong clear tuneful voice. A joy to watch.

Adam Drummey brought energy and bounce to the role of country bumpkin Farmer Giles creating a good comic character and interacting well with **Izzie Holdsworth's** light of foot dancing cow, Pat with the occasional well-timed Moo.

Alex Taggart's Wee Willy Winky was another cheeky comic delight, handling the two shout out phrases with the audience well, even when they were a little slow to react! At times he benefited from the audience making up their own jokes, but he has the look of a natural comic and even dressed as the Teacher he immediately raised a smile by his presence on stage.

John Aherne looked the part of the Dame, Old Mother Hubbard with some excellent makeup and brightly coloured wigs. It was unfortunate that on the first night he needed a few prompts, but he managed to make the most of the situation with his ad libs and the young performers in the Kitchen scene coped



Be inspired by amateur theatre

well with the pauses. Not every gag landed, and I was bemused by the Muffin Man song! Perhaps the biggest laugh came with his line “I don’t know what to say” .

Josie Clarke’s Jill alongside **Theo Fletcher’s** Jack were another delightful strong pairing and nearly stole every scene they were in. Their youthful confidence, strong clear voices and good comic timing was wonderful to watch. The business with the car chase and crash was handled very well by Jack and was a fresh element to the show especially with **Ian Waite’s** news reader voiceovers. Jill did well in her reactions hidden downstage right amongst the presents. She closed Act 1 with Miss Muffet, and the Fairy in *The heat is on* with a very good dance routine.

Glenn O’Mara- Baldwin was everything you expect from a villain as Baron Von Brie with a marvellous evil cackle and a mean-spirited glare that seemed to reflect every Landlord and property developer you could imagine with a very nasty aggressive streak. He fully earned the boos for his melodramatic portrayal.

Helen Clarke and **Pam Walters** returned as the Brokers men characters, Wrack and Ruin, once again establishing a good double act with well-judged reactions to the story. They executed one of my favourite pantomime routines, Mr Who, Mr What and Mr IDontknow with great precision and clarity so we followed each twist and turn of the sketch. Equally the fresh new sketch built around the *Now that is what I call music* compilations was handled extremely well and was a show highlight that could grace any pantomime this season.

Lorna Cottrill’s Little Boy Blue was everything we want from a traditional Principal Boy, confidently striding the stage, singing well with a strong voice and timing the business well. The “magic hat” sketch was handled with excellent timing for the silences and horn blowing.

Izzie and **Eloise Holdsworth** and **Frank Fletcher** also showed great potential as performers as Margery Daw, Mary Quite Contrary and Jack Horner especially in their confident delivery of lines centre stage scene 1 and in the schoolroom sketch. Jack’s giggling reaction on the front row was delightful. I loved the Act 2 business of Halo and Higher, so simple but very cleverly done. They did well



Be inspired by amateur theatre

as the spiders too. I hope **Ciara Bourne** recovers and gets to play some performances later in the run. Three more young talents with potential.

Jill Dady made a strong impression as the EastEnder cockney Li'l Bo Beep usefully tying up the plot with lovely lines about "no one fleeces me", "where the Flocks my sheep" and "Faamalies". Barbara Windsor would have loved it.

Roger Blackman's Mr Kipling did exceedingly well with his posh accent and a brilliant play on "we buy any car.com" that was worth waiting the whole play for his arrival!

Pickles the dog was of course a crowd pleaser too.

Creative team

Simon Arnold 's script and direction were first class with each character well established and using the nursery rhymes lines as part of their introduction. The incorporation of so many traditional pantomime routines into a new story was refreshing and a joy to watch. The *If I was not upon the stage* was brilliantly conceived, flowing from the story with very well-rehearsed physical comedy and deserved an encore. The School room sketch too had a fresh feel despite some old gags and was very well presented. The ghost bench scenes was also freshened up and fitted into the story very well. The Christmas fayre set up looked like it was designed for some more gags that had been cut due to overrunning time! A few gags fell flat on the first night, but this was generally a very funny pantomime with a well-rehearsed cast of good performers. There was no sense that this was a "second rate script and third-rate actors"! The society tradition of handing out sweets takes far too long without some action on stage to watch.

The musical selection, backing tracks & choreography by **Vicki Arnold** were all well-chosen and generally within the range of the performers. There was a strong opening routine with *We need a little Christmas* which made a pleasant scene setter and it worked to have two rows of good dancers and rest of cast on raised platform to make the scene busy but not cluttered. I enjoyed the lead singers and dancers in *I wanna dance*, *The heat is on*, *You will be found* (with some lovely harmonies) and *Rockin' around the Christmas tree* who had



Be inspired by amateur theatre

good voices and moved well together in well drilled routines. *Revolting Children* choreographed by **Josie Clarke** was another show highlight that flowed well from the script and was well done by the younger cast with some good precise footwork.

The lighting by **Jonathan Stacey** and **Kay Smith** was good throughout without dark spaces, good use of spots and an excellent green wash on stage for one scene. The business at start of Act 2 was a good addition highlighting a clever piece of business. The Car chase scene was very effective. The proscenium light LED tubes were well used and not overused adding something different to the lighting. **Mark Hastings** sound was very well balanced, so we heard all the vocals with some good additional sound effects and intro music. The opening storm looked and sounded dramatic although I failed to see the connection with the story that followed!

Stage Manager, **Susan Pickles** and her crew made sure the play flowed smoothly with a very quick striking of the School room scene and quiet setting behind the tabs of other full stage scenes.

The staging and props by **Simon Arnold, Alex Taggart, Isabelle Walters, and Pam Walters** was excellent with very well painted portals, tumbler cloths and back cloths with some good detail like the Staying Inn sign. The Market scene finale was also well dressed and underused without filling too much of the stage for the full cast. It was clear that a lot of time and effort had gone into the staging, and it created very attractive pictures for the show.

The costumes looked very well coordinated and stitched by **Helen Clarke, Susan Bell, and John Wesson** making the characters instantly recognisable with a good comic touch . Wee Willie Winky, Little Boy Blue , Jack and Jill and Li'l Bo Beep were especially good. It was also a lovely touch to have Fairy Berry dressed the same as the Fairy on the tree.

The makeup by **Susan Pickles** for the Dame was suitably over the top, there was a lovely sparkle around the Fairy's eyes and the Baron's greyed beard worked well.



Be inspired by amateur theatre

The Programme by Vicki Arnold was simple and useful although it is always good to have short bio's of cast and the NODA paragraph is missing so it does not qualify for the competition. See [Programme and Poster Competition - NODA](#)

There was as always, a warm welcome on arrival (even before the house had opened!) and a lovely atmosphere Front of House creating an appealing and inviting experience. This was a first-class production and demonstrated a lot of effort had gone into every aspect of the show. There may have been a slight imbalance between first and second half and a fraction too long running time. It was a fresh story, a plot that just about made sense of the nursery rhyme characters, well staged with confident performers who could sing and dance . A triumph for the society.

Thank you

Nick

Nick Humby - NODA Representative - London Region - District 14