



Society :Riverside Player
Production : Peter Pan
Date : 7th Dec 2018
Venue :Memorial Hall, Old Windsor
Report by : Terry Hunt

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Show Report

Entering the Memorial Hall, I welcomed the warm and inviting, rosy glow of the auditorium, especially on such a cold night. A big improvement on the overall experience of attending a Riverside Players production. The equally warm welcome from the FOH team and a glass of wine all helped get into the Panto spirit. Very much appreciated. Thank you

I applaud the work to brighten up the wing extensions, with a very recognisable London night scene on SR and Palm Trees SL..with clouds over the top of the proscenium.

While nicely done and imaginative, it does create an aesthetic imbalance to the look for the stage, with the trees forming apart of some Neverland scenes, whereas 'London' didn't really. Perhaps doing something a bit more decoratively generic would have created a better balance. All that said, I did appreciate the effort made and the work certainly brightened up the proscenium...and is was relevant.

The rest of the staging was very good and well done to Susan Pickles and the backstage crew for conducting all the changes so quietly and smoothly.

I liked the childhood /sailing themed décor of the nursery. I don't know if it was intentional or not, but the 'look' of the nursery was quite dull and came across as quite colourless, however this did increase the sense of light, space, colour and magic, when in we landed in Neverland, so it worked.

Having the U/S rostra a similar height to the window cill helped with any unsightly awkwardness of climbing in and out and therefor the flying element wasn't missed too much.

With the rostra doubling up as the poop deck of Hooks ship, with a nicely painted and wrinkle free cloth behind it looked very good, along with the addition of set dressing, ropes, boss, barrels etc. (I've probably mentioned the lack of wrinkles before, but it is rare in amateur companies). All other cloths and scenes were of an equally good standard. I especially appreciated the slightly translucent cloth used for the mermaid cove scenes, layered/lit for the effect of depth. Very well thought out and executed ideas. Very well done to all those involved.

I do think that if the budget can afford it, some of the flats could do with being recovered soon. Years worth of paint is taking it's toll and the layers/painted over cracking were very evident in The Nursery scene. This needn't be an expensive exercise as long as the frames are sound. Alternatively, if the flats are made with a robust canvas and you can find willing volunteers, the paint can be scrubbed off!

Once again, I have to congratulate all the technical team, for their excellent work. Jonathan Stacey and Alfie Waters for their LX and Mark Hastings for SFX. The warmth and variety of lighting states was ideal , with 'London' looking a bit cold and colourless, and then the bright, warm, vivid colours of Neverland, in contrast.

Sound was clear and of a good quality, well balanced and had spot on timing of SFX. The incidental music for linking scenes helped with the feeling of momentum avoiding those awkward, scene change silences which can sometimes happen. The kind of thoughtful detail which makes the difference between a good production and a very good one.

All the above said, if there is ONE thing I felt missing was ongoing lighting and/or sound effects associated with Tinkerbell throughout the performance.

I feel that Peter Pan wouldn't be the same without some sort of flying sequence, and the rather lovely flying projection by Roger Lewiston, was an excellent option. Again, in part, because it was so well done. It was rather odd with the first sequence effectively looking backwards as we head of to Neverland, however it worked well and it almost felt like we (the audience) were along for the ride!

I feel that technically, Riverside Players far exceed expectations for a village hall production and the limitations /challenges which come with that. The quality of what was achieved could only be significantly improved with more equipment and expense, but may be financially counterproductive. With production values already as high as they are at Riverside Players, to maintain the current level is already better than I would expect. Staging too, is already of a great standard in terms of the thought and effort put in, so well done to EVERYONE concerned.

Props and set dressing were well used with the majority not looking 'home made' however some of the swords the children were playing with could have done with looking MORE home made. I'm not sure they would have had metal (or metal looking plastic) toy swords at their disposal.

I like the way use of props were seemingly incorporated into the direction, such as the ropes binding Tiger Lily were gathered up and taken off as part of the action, rather than someone self consciously gathering them up as an afterthought at the end of the scene.

Costumes were also of a good standard and all appeared to fit well. Make up for the majority of the cast was not over done, and even Simon as the Nana Smee, wasn't overly gourdly. Everything about the Mermaids' cove scenes was lovely. It felt like we were in a very different environment, with the lighting, set and iridescent mermaid costumes. Annie Ross and Susan Pickles (...and Nadeem Valecha) are to be congratulated for the outstanding costume and make up for Claude. I've never seen a production of Peter Pan where the crocodile was a character, but I doubt creating the look of the character could be done much better. One TINY thing is that the brown shoes stood out as being a bit too brown against all the green, and also, footwear in general was a little random, with some wearing regular trainers. I feel plimsolls are more neutral/less contemporary.

Choreography by Lorna Cottrill and Samantha Somerville, was nicely pitched in that everyone seemed to be able to manage the routines without looking lost or out of their comfort zone, Equally, some of the more capable dancers seemed very well rehearsed and together in numbers like Colours of the Wind. I would like to have seen some routines broken up a bit, for instance seeing 'Hook' dancing the same routine as Rum & Coke for BAD, didn't fit with his character. It was done well, but having Hook doing something different and perhaps less 'dancy' would have added extra interest and contrast. However, in all it was a very good achievement by Lorna and Samantha.

Well done too, to Vicki Arnold for the Marine routine. There's nothing I didn't like about the whole scene. It was fun, imaginative, well executed and perfect pantomime entertainment.

Again, very well done to Vicki Arnold for having to take over the eponymous character at short notice. As far as I could see, it was as polished a performance as I would have hoped for, even with more rehearsal time. I feel I can't ignore the elephant in the room, which is that Vicki isn't quite as young, and lacked some of the spritely exuberance, of a character known for never growing up. HOWEVER, it's no criticism. It was the right choice and a small price to pay for an assured and seemingly confident performance, over substituting someone less experienced or confident. Vicky has a natural stage presence and displays great stagecraft in her use of the stage, props and awareness of other performers.

The 'clapping' sequence was very sincere and I imagine all believers were entirely convinced that they saving a fairy!! Songs were also sung beautifully, though I would like 'Peter' to have moved about more, in a carefree manner...and settling down to sleep (rather than standing) for Make Your Own Kind Of Music.

Nadeem Val gave a cracking, full on and energetic performance as Claude. Taking the stage by storm and giving a totally committed performance, I felt it was shame the cool dude character wasn't written into the storyline more. Some of the words did get a bit lost in the opening number, but Crocodile Rock was one of the highlights of the evening.

Jake Longstaff and Josie Clarke did very well as John and Michael Darling. They reacted well to whatever was happening in the scenes and Josie had a particularly cheeky way about her which was very endearing. Jake must remember not to look for family/friends in the audience, as happened in the opening scene. Remember that even when you're not acting or saying any lines, the audience are still watching.

Josie Blackburn was an absolute darling as Wendy Darling. Pretty with a ribbon in her hair, pink frock and ballet shoes, she was the perfect young English rose, striking the right balance between an innocent girl and a caring older sister. What I was most impressed with is that Josie obviously gives considerable thought to her lines. Every time Josie spoke, her prosody was absolutely relevant for the message of her line(s) as the character of Wendy, rather than delivering the lines as Josie might normally. A very professional performance.

Simon Arnold's Nana Smee was fully engaged with the audience and kept us nicely warmed up throughout. A positive and (mostly) confident performance, full of energy and the corny puns kept coming. I feel that Nana Smee could have been given a bit more 'character' playing on the lusty Dame/matronly Nanny difference in personality, but a very enjoyable performance nonetheless.

I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles) with Captain Hook wasn't together as it might have been, but it was fun.

I felt that Mr & Mrs Darling , as played by Susan Pickles and Alan Payn, seemed very disconnected to everything, in such a way it was difficult to tell if that was intentional (ie. the distant parents who rely on the Nanny to deal with the little ones), or if the scene was a little under directed/rehearsed. Susan reacts well to onstage events, but seemed slightly distracted? It may be the case (as I have found when in a similar position), that being the Stage Manager (or any backstage crew) appearing on stage as a character, it can be difficult to STOP being a backstage person.

Alan transformed well into the stereotypical Captain Hook, growling with attitude. There was a good rapport with Rum, Cole and Nana leading to plenty of comedic moments. Alan performed the dance routines well...with the aforementioned attitude. As already mentioned, I'm Gonna Be could have been rehearsed more, but it was still entertaining.

Krystina Houghton looked lovely as Tinkerbell and gave a very sound performance addressing the audience with clarity , though I feel she could have been more playful....and lacked (visible) fairy dust. Defying Gravity was very nicely handled.

Susan Bell and Alex Taggart were a great double act as Rum and Coke, filling the stage with their presence and energy. My immediate thought about Alex was that he was being TOO nice and likeable to be a baddy...however, learning that Rum and Coke aren't so bad after all, it all worked out well.

Susan has great comedic timing and is so expressive, she is lovely to watch. Rum and Coke felt very much like a driving force of the production, keeping the momentum up.

As previously mentioned, I enjoyed everything about the mermaid scenes, (costumes, set, lighting, script, music) but the performances of Kay Smith and Pam Walters as Essex Girl Mermaids, was the icing. The pair looked great and just seemed to be having a good time with it. The series of seafood jokes was very humorous and their enjoyment carried over the 'footlights'. Great accents and a lot of fun. Even their laugh, made me laugh.

I assume Kays clipboard was for script, but at no point did I notice it being referred to, so it was either well disguised or not needed, so well done to Kay for taking on the role at short notice.

As well as the aesthetics of it, it would have made more sense to have the 2 mermaids doing the swimming routine to You're The One That I Want, but I perfectly understand why 'Peter' did it (Vicki originally being Chardonnay) and it still worked extremely well.

Well done to Izzy Holdsworth as Tiger Lily, singing Colours Of The Wind with such confidence. Dialogue was a little rushed at times...which was just nerves I suspect. If Izzy can deliver her lines with the same confidence as she sings, it will make her overall performance, even better.

The supporting cast of smaller roles, Indians, lost boys, pirates etc, all performed their parts well, with clean entrances and exits and some nice performances happening in the background. Especially well done to the Lost Boys, who kept up a good pace. Another 'well done' to Ava Peppiatt who was excellent. Very good, clear expressive diction and some great reactions, relating to whatever was happening. Does a marvellous line in 'exasperated'. Congrats to Maisie Wright and Zachary Gardner for some outstanding 'Flossing'.

Director Jill Dady lead a very competent team of people, both on and off stage, to create an all round, excellent pantomime. Plenty of lovely characters, a great pace and technically well thought out. The 'shadow' scene worked well, and I even enjoyed the slapstick, pie in the face section, which can get a bit ropery sometimes, especially if it gets out of hand. Having Peter appear in the window at the very end, listening to the story, was a bit of a 'Goosebumps' moment.

If anything, I would like the Finale to have a little more about it, and maybe firing the arrows in to the wings (firing the arrows at all was brave. Can go very iffy) would have been a bit of a cheat, but may have worked slightly more convincingly. However, a couple of just a few small points in an otherwise excellent production. Well done Jill and All involved.

Terry Hunt – Joint NODA Rep, London Region – Dist 14