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National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

Society : Riverside Players
Production : **The Prince's Ball**
Date : Sunday 5th December 2021
Venue : Old Windsor Memorial Hall
Report by : Nick Humby

Show Report

Overall Production Impression

There was a warm welcome for my first visit to the Old Windsor Memorial Hall which felt airy and spacious with a good size stage thanks to the addition of the large temporary forestage. It was great to see a wide age range of performers on stage and the younger players being given a chance to take key roles. The stage never felt overcrowded even when most of the cast were in the scene.

Perhaps taking inspiration from Pantoland at the Palladium, the Riverside Players' one act family panto was a fresh clever script packed with cheesy old and new sounding jokes, adult innuendo and some classic pantomime business which was very well judged for a family audience returning to a live theatre for the first time in two years. While Silly Billy got a lot of the best gags, most characters had a chance to raise a laugh too. The Memorial Hall was probably just far away from Windsor Castle for the Royal Princes' mickey taking to not be overheard!

It looked very pretty with some wonderfully painted pastel tumbler back drops which perfectly set the scenes and were very well lit by the small number of front of house lamps (by **Roger Lewiston**) so that there were no dark spots and the projections over the proscenium were still clearly visible and effective. The sound balance (by **Mark Hastings**) was also very good with a well edited music track never overwhelming the voices.



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Cast and Crew

Fairy Astra played by **Jill Dady** got the production off to an excellent start with some witty rhyming couplets and a large syringe in hand and then made an amusing “Jackie Weaver” style zoom call reminding us all of what has become the norm over the last 2 years!

It was an interesting idea to introduce Josie as an audience member roped into the show, but I felt it was underwritten and she could have been called on to interact more or been given a chair or clipboard as a prop. Young **Josie Clarke** confidently made the most of the part and was particularly good when she became entranced by the Queen.

Vicki Arnold (as well as arranging the music and choreography) had the best character to play in the show as Queen Megana in a fabulous costume. Her physical presence, strong clear diction and facial expressions gave her a delightfully evil royal persona stealing the scene whenever she was on.

The young actress **Jessica Davies** did well in playing the love interest Crystal Cleaner opposite a traditional Principal Boy (a tradition that I wish was more sustained) with **Samantha Somerville** as Prince Harry. They delivered their duet together of “Dance with me Tonight” with strong pleasant clear voices and effective choreography.

Simon Arnold, as well as writing and directing the show, was rarely off stage as Silly Billy and with each entrance got a good reaction to his dreadful jokes! His excellent comic delivery and audience engagement drove the pace and energy of the show and he clearly had added lines to keep the script very topical .He combined well with Flip (played by **Elliot Whitehorn**) and Flop (played by **Alex Taggart**) in an excellent recreation of the classic wallpapering sketch with good comic timing and reactions. It was a good twist to retain the sling on Flip from an injury during rehearsal to add some fresh business and Flop covered well from missing trapping the wallpaper on the step !

Alan Payn looked the part as the Dame, Widow Cleaner and was well matched with **Roger Blackman** as King Dandy Lion. Their “A dance of love” did not work but their “Sweet Caroline” dance routine that followed was a show highlight.



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Nearly everybody got in on another classic ghost scene this time with **Tilly Wright** causing the frights as a sprightly Boris the Spider.

The young ensemble of **Tilly Wright, Maisie Wright, Eloise Holdsworth, and Izzie Holdsworth** were excellent in the big numbers of the opening “Shut up and Dance” and in the best choreography of the show in “Can’t stop the feeling” and “Marry you” especially when they used the stage space to break up the three lines into a more varied presentation and movement.

The show was slickly staged without delays and with smooth scenes changes by Stage Manager, **Susan Pickles** and her crew and was very well costumed by the stitchers crew, especially those costumes of Harry, Billy, Megana, Josie and the Ensemble.

It is very refreshing to see an up-to date modern topical pantomime written by one member of the society, well-paced in the direction, funny in the delivery with just enough music and dance to create a rounded show. I look forward to what they do next when the current pandemic allows a full return to the annual production cycle.

Thank you

Nick

Nick Humby - NODA Representative - London Region - District 14