



Be inspired by amateur theatre

National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

Society : Shinfield Players
Production : Rapunzel
Date : Friday 19th January 2024
Venue : Shinfield Players Theatre
Report by : Nick Humby

Show Report

Overall Production Impression

The traditional fairy tale of Rapunzel has become a new addition to the current Christmas Pantomime titles and Toby Bradford and Tina Webster's script has a good narrative while leaving plenty of scope for comic business and a good spread of roles for a large cast of Principals so makes it a good choice for amateur societies. The Shinfield Players production stages this script in a very creative set with some excellent painted clothes with wonderful perspective, clever wing flats that unfold to form the interior of the Palace and the Salon and a very detailed and practical interior of her Tower set upstage. These sets with some excellent costumes for the Fairy, Witch, Brokers Men, the Dame and King and Queen give the show an impressive look and feel.

There are good familiar tunes that flow from the narrative and are sung well by the Principals including *Don't stop me now*, *All by myself*, *Together*, *Thriller*, *and Good morning Nevermore* with some simple and effective choral support and choreography. The comic business included the traditional ghost business, a slosh scene, some comic business with making a ladder, a very good sequence of hair puns and occasional mild adult innuendo. There could have been more pace in some of the execution which at times seemed slightly hesitant but the audience interactions and what appeared to be improvised and ad lib responses were handled very well.



Be inspired by amateur theatre

The central performances of Rapunzel, the Prince, Frankie, the Fairy and Gothel were very strong and drove the story telling well and with a good vocals and music mix the audience were able to enjoy a very good-looking production.

Cast

Fairy Floral played by **Nadine Masserson** as a west country Pam Ayres type poetic magical character was absolutely charming with a twinkle in the eye, she delivered the rhyming couplets perfectly and kept the story on track and made her telling interventions with delightful control and clarity.

Opposite her, Gothel played by **Emma Fuller** was magnificent as the evil witch with a chilling loud cackle and bags of stage presence she dominated the stage on each entrance. She handled the audience interaction extremely well especially when there were no expected boos adjusting her lines wonderfully. She managed the two key moments of being knocked unconscious and her eventual defeat to good effect, although a little more smoke was required to cover her exit!

It is always great to honour the tradition of Principal Boy in Pantomime and this production included two prominent females as men which worked very well. **Helen Cuthbertson** strode the stage as Prince Frederick to good effect (although I was not sure about the dark glasses in opening scene) with a strong confident clear voice and the obligatory thigh slap. She captured the egotistical spoiled brat character in the first act and then the softening love struck lad in the second. She showed off her music background with an enjoyable rendition of *Don't stop me now*. **Caitlin Lammin** looked like she was having great fun as the valet, Frankie revelling in the audience interaction with a happy engaging grin and reacting well to the action around her including exasperation with the wayward Prince. Her duet with **Cuthbertson** in *Together* was a show highlight.

Grace Page too was well cast as Rapunzel, handled her long plait of hair very effectively and delivered my favourite line of the show when looking at two men "I am not sure what they are for" as a wonderful put down. She too showed her singing background with a wistful *All by myself* especially when she came down stage centre in the final verses.



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Matthew Lugg made as strong pantomime debut as Dame Trixie playing the role as a man in a dress with some wonderful brightly coloured wigs. The hair puns were very well done with a lovely sense of pushing the idea to the limit and the audience interaction was also confidently and effectively handled. I enjoyed the impromptu entrance in *Together* which was a good physical gag.

Karen Bird and George Apap made an amusing double act of Curly and Bob with a touch of the Laurel and Hardy about them in their demeanour. They were at their best when they appeared to go off script and improv/ad lib reacting to the audience when they seemed to relax and enjoy the business more especially at start of Act 2 when an audience member entered late. Slosh scenes are some of the hardest comedy routines to execute and the one in the Salon was a good effort. Although it did not manage to create a sense of spontaneity and surprise, it was great to see it included in the show.

Dan Walford and Karen Todd as the King and Queen looked and sounded suitably regal and could have had more to do in the show. The roles of Lucie, Macie and Gracie played by **Lucy Bolton, Benita Venables and Ravenna Patel** were an interesting addition and a good opportunity to bring people out of the chorus. They set the show off to a good start with *Good morning Evermore* and again in Act 2 with *Footloose*. These provided lively and upbeat routines. It was a good running gag to have Macie swoon faint throughout. **Steven King** looked suitably awkward at the repeated advances of the Dame toward the Captain of the Guard and **Mo Churcher** did well as the Herald. Both spoke with strong clear voices.

It was good to see so many progressing from the SPT youth group into the Chorus of **Mo Churcher, Abbie Secular Clark, Alana Clark, Beth Everied, Jessica Shuttleworth, Naomi Sutton, Rebecca Chiswick, and Sophie Pope** and hopefully in future years into Principal roles. I enjoyed the routines of *Putting on the ritz* and as the creatures in *Thriller* as well as their roles in the song sheet.

Creatives

It was clear from the programme that **Matt Chishick** had a clear vision for this show which he was able to execute through the set, lighting, and sound design and in his direction. This vision was clear from the clever use of the stage to



Be inspired by amateur theatre

define the various locations with excellent use of the tumblers, unfolding side flats and the woodland tabs to smooth transitions between scenes. The setting for the inside of the Tower was excellent with plenty of good detail and practical features and the window entrance was well managed so it did not look too awkward to climb through. The permanent setting of this deep upstage meant some key action was enacted a long way back and might have been brought forward to be more engaging e.g. the ladder making and opening of *All by myself*. The cast were generally very well blocked and grouped, never looking overcrowded and effectively positioned when frozen by spells. At times the pacing of the business might have benefited from more variation especially in some of the comedy routines which occasionally felt slow and deliberate.

Lara Savory and her band provided a good backing to the singers and pleasing underscore to cover the scene changes. The singers seemed well coached in their delivery of their songs with a good selection of familiar tunes and it was good to keep some songs short and sweet. **Gilly Meek's** choreography was well rehearsed and within the capabilities of the cast with a strong routine for *Good Morning Evermore* and a delightful nod to the *Thriller* video being my personal favourites.

The scenic artistes **Di Capel and Natalie Clark** had done a fabulous job with the back clothes with magnificent perspective in the village and country lane clothes. Joining them in the construction, **Tim Howling, Yvonne Mitchell, Steve Toon, Graham Smith, Sam Turner**, and others had created a very effective settings with smooth transitions and creating differentiated and appropriate spaces for each scene. This was clear evidence of the benefit of having your own venue.

Stage Management under **Sam Turner** did an effective job switching scenes smoothly and quietly including I imagine a messy clean up after the slosh scene. The lighting changes were well executed although there was one slightly delayed blackout as Gothel started to climb the Tower.

Costumes led by **Carol Vockins** assisted the characterisations very well with wonderful green look for the Fairy and a dark black look for Gothel and



Be inspired by amateur theatre

amusing lederhosen for Curly and Bob. Rapunzel did look like she was in a pink nightie for much of the show! The Chorus court costumes looked great.

Hair and Makeup by **Pam Dennis** included very well-chosen wigs for the King and Queen, Bob and Curly and a good range of colourful wigs for the Dame which also enhanced the characterisations hugely. The Rapunzel hair plait matched her own hair very well and looked believable to be strong enough to climb up!

The props arranged by **Debbie Wheeler and Graham Smith** were practical and effective with an excellent tear bottle and glitter effect, a solid looking bed pan and good detailed settings for the Tower interior. Perhaps more could have been made of the props for the slosh scenes to add physical jokes or visual product puns .

The Programme designed by **Mathew Chishick** was extremely well put together. It is always great to see the songs listed and credited and useful biogs of cast as well as rehearsal pictures. The cover design was attractive and appropriate.

As always it is a pleasure to visit the Shinfield Players Theatre with a warm welcome, good facilities, and a lovely atmosphere. Look forward to seeing you all again in March.

Thank you

Nick

Nick Humby - NODA Representative - London Region - District 14