

Shrek - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (27th February 2020) Review by Cheryl Jennings

Where to start? This was one spectacle of a show and a formidable and expensive undertaking for an amateur society, even one as experienced as CAODS – celebrating their 100 years anniversary later this year! What a showcase to highlight how good an amateur group can be when they are confident they can pull off something this big, and they did pull it off of course!

The story begins in the land of Far, Far Away where a green ogre called Shrek and trusty steed, Donkey, are on a quest to rescue the beautiful Princess Fiona from a tower where she is imprisoned and guarded by a fire breathing dragon. Mix into the plot a vertically challenged ‘baddie’ in the shape of Lord Farquaad and a whole storybook full of misfit fairy tale characters, and the possibility for comedy is limitless.

In costumes that were elaborate and heavy and with prosthetics to cope with too, this cast made a good job of the musical numbers. It wasn’t always easy to hear all the lyrics but the company injected great enthusiasm into what, at best, are fairly tuneless songs for a musical that probably deserved better. The hard working, energetic and beautifully portrayed characters saved the day with their exuberance and likeability.

There were many excellent principals so I’ll start with Shrek, our unlikely hero, played by Mitchell Lathbury. He had the stature for this role and an impeccable Scottish accent. He sang well and effortlessly although at times his diction was hindered by the facial prosthetics. I’m not sure how he managed to perform so well in such uncomfortable headgear but he showed no sign of this being a hindrance, a good performance. His sidekick, Donkey, was played to great effect by Nathan Gray. Nathan maintained his fast talking, non-stop patter all through, bringing out all the humour of the part, he made an excellent foil for Shrek. Joanne Quinney took the part of Princess Fiona and was tailor made for this role. She looked perfect, has a lovely singing voice and great comedy skills, she radiated with stage presence. Her song ‘Morning Person’ was hilarious, aided by the special effects of the bird and the deer and even included a tap routine, I enjoyed her performance enormously. The diminutive Lord Farquaad (David Everest-Ring) in a brilliant costume, spent the entire show on his knees. He had the audience in fits of laughter at his antics with his little legs and he made the most of his excellent dialogue. He was obviously relishing this gift of a comedy role, so well played.

Other performances very worthy of mention were Keeley Denman as Dragon, looking and sounding fabulous –what a voice! The Sugar Plum Fairy (doubling as the voice of the Gingerbread man) was Natasha Palmer who was stunning to look at and brilliant as the voice of ‘Gingy’. Pinocchio was another star turn with his incredible growing nose and the Three Blind Mice, glamorously costumed in sequins, made a dazzling contribution. There were Three Little Pigs, the Three Bears, a wicked witch and every other fairy tale character you could think of, bringing the stage to life when they appeared. This production boasted an

enormous cast and they made several appearances in the aisles, a technique I'm personally not fond of as it takes away some of the magic but in the fabulous lighting on stage they were stunning. Scene changes were slick and seamless from swamp to castle to a forest with moving trees. Technically this show was a triumph from the enormous fire breathing dragon to the bird exploding in the tree. The special effects manager, John Sullivan and his team deserve congratulations.

All in all this was a good production of a musical that doesn't always hit the spot. The show was not the star here – the special effects and the performers were! CAODS succeeded in giving us a memorable performance worthy of their centenary year.

It's worth following this link to see more of the company photos

<https://bradwendes.com/theatre-shrek-the-musical>

Photo by Brad Wendes.