

Shrek the Musical
Performed by CAODS
Friday 28th February 2020
Director and Choreographer – Chris Cuming
Musical Director – Clare Penfold

Anticipation was high for this much acclaimed popular musical, recently released to be performed by eager and talented group CAODS, who have obviously worked tirelessly for months on a bank breaking budget to do justice for this elaborate and technically challenging production. Castles, forests, high towers, talking animals and a mythical, fire-breathing dragon – we had it all. Once the enthusiastic dry ice had cleared smoke gave way to the young Shrek performed on this evening by Joseph Fox. His prosthetic hands slightly ungainly on his small frame, it looked suitably awkward as his parents effectively banished him from the family as seems to be the tradition for ogres. You learn something new every day!

Mitchell Lathbury playing Shrek looked perfect in his role as an overbearing grumpy ogre. After a few faltering opening notes the stage was filled with misplaced fairy tale creatures, a real kaleidoscope of colour and suitable chaos in uproar of their eviction. The set of the forest complete with gliding tree trunks to also accommodate entrances gave the stage real depth and space. The audience could not take in in the full glory of each costume for each unique character; all exquisitely detailed and each unique. Pinocchio played by Kieran Bacon made an endearing spokesperson for his uprooted community. A very clever costume complete with extendable nose to match. I did find it difficult at times to understand what he was saying. The accumulation of characters on stage caused the scene to be maybe more chaotic than intended. It was however a feast for the senses. The characterization of each creature and their relationships were clearly well-rounded.

Donkey played with springs in his feet by Nathan Gaey leapt onto the stage with an energy that never faded. Seemingly comfortable in his woolly costume complete with hooves on his hands, he provided the audience with a great leader through the narrative. He was instantly likeable and a perfect contrast to Shrek's lumbering dejected attitude. With a smooth singing voice and a strong American accent that rolled easily through his lines, he was a perfect Donkey and instantly recognisable not just in costume, but character. The introduction of the infamous Lord Farquaad played brilliantly by the talented David Everest- Ring was hilarious for children and adults equally. The script paved the way for the grown-ups to have a laugh at the discrete innuendos which were taken advantage of in full. His costume was simply brilliant and the audience eagerly anticipated every entrance. The Duloc dancers gave us a great choreographed performance, despite awkward but very clever costumes.

Scene changes from forest to castle to dragon's lair to tower were seamless and almost magical. Such attention to detail really paid off and it felt as though you were in the DreamWorks studio itself. A particular favourite of mine was the emerging bridge over hot lava which appeared from seemingly nowhere, and disappeared just as quickly.

Nerves may have got the better of the young Fiona played by Olivia Curran as her vocals were a little off, but she grew in confidence when the older Fiona's joined her for their group song. Teenage Fiona played by Holly Bird held her own very well in this perfect small role for a budding actress. However our Princess Fiona played by Joanne Quinney was a real delight. Her vocals were sublime and she looked every part the princess we all know from the film. A dream role for any actress and

perfectly cast. The appearance of the dragon was one hotly anticipated and it did not disappoint; huge in stature, scary for the children and a delight for the adults. Lovely smooth movement, smoke and lights made it truly dominate the stage. The dragon played by Keeley Denman had vocals to match the dragon's stature. A huge stage presence, she delivered a vocal powerful performance. It gave us a flavour of attending a rock concert. Elsewhere, I did find some of the lighting quite inefficient, particularly in picking out actors for solos. Shadows were cast and some presence was lost, and some of the vocals were also drowned out with the orchestra. Some of the blocking also made it difficult for the audience to see poignant moments; in particular the first appearance of Fiona as an ogre on the rocks in the moonlight. Sitting to the side in the audience I missed her completely, and Shrek was in shadow. It was such a shame as their performances were on point.

It was lovely to have a variety of of the musical genres particularly the tap dancing and three blind mice delivering us a Motown hit. Charlotte Broad, Katie Doran and Hollie Rawlings made a perfect trio for these characters, led by donkey in the song Make a Move.

I would like to have seen a little more light in Shrek's character to truly believe that Fiona was falling in love with him.

A few fairytale characters that stood out for me apart from the ones already mentioned were the Wicked Witch played by Diana Easton and the White Rabbit played by Millie Parsons who never stopped bouncing as you would expect from the White rabbit. The Knights too, played by Michael Bardo, Oli Budino, Nathan Owen and Matt Wickham gave the other characters an opportunity to mock and tease and worked well together. The priest at the wedding played by Nick Mayes was a lovely small character part delivered for laughs.

Overall all this production was hugely successful. The prosthetics and costumes were ambitious and a real opportunity to stretch this groups ability and imagination. It was a great group effort lead strongly by director and choreographer Chris Cuming. It was delivered with true strength and coherence from character to costume to set. Sadly some of the vocals were lost as mentioned before and some simple blocking issues meant not all the action was seen by all the audience. However for such a hugely challenging production it was a hugely entertaining night out. Well done to all involved and I hope to see more of this this brilliant group once again.

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