

## **Shrek The Musical – 25 February 2020**

### **Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society (CAODS) (directory)**

#### **Reviewer: Michael Gray (Sardines review)**

It's been a charming children's picture book, a movie franchise, a hit show on Broadway and now a favourite with the more ambitious community musical theatre companies, with music by Jeanine Tesori and book and lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire.

The family-friendly "once-upon-a-time" story follows our familiar, if improbable, hero and his asinine sidekick Donkey as they ride out to brave a dragon and rescue a Princess from her tower cell.

CAODS field a huge company, filling the stage, and the aisles, with a chaotic bunch of fairy-tale characters all anxious to have their turn in the spotlight. But they're a side-show, really, to Shrek's story of chivalry and true love required.

It's played out against a forest back-drop of moving trees – the swamp barely suggested – and impressive set pieces for the castle, the cathedral, the rickety bridge ...

Chris Cuming, making his directorial debut for CAODS, keeps the action moving; there are some fine production numbers, too: Forever, with the Dragon, Donkey and the bearded knights stuck in their stocks-on-casters, and Morning Person, where Princess Fiona is joined by the Pied Piper and those wonderful tap-dancing rats in grey top hats and tails.

The trick here is to make these musical numbers – workmanlike at best – seem like the showstoppers they wish they were. Joanne Quinney's Fiona excels at this, combining an outstanding voice with a big personality and a flair for comedy. Impressive comedy moments too from David Everest-Ring's diminutive Farquaad; shuffling nimbly around the stage on his knees – a gag that manages to stay funny till the end – and delivering some brilliant lines with perfect comic timing.

Mitchell Lathbury is Shrek – a solid presence as the lovable ogre, and a fine vocalist, notably in Build a Wall and the big finish to Act One: Who I'd Be. But his prosthetics sometimes make it hard to read his facial expressions, which limits the emotion he can convey and the empathy we can feel. One of the minority who chose not to speak American, his words are occasionally indistinct, an issue which also affects Nathan Gray's excellent yankee Donkey, a great favourite with the enthusiastic opening night audience. Among many other pleasingly extrovert performances: Kieran Bacon's Pinocchio, complete with extending nose, and Keeley Denman's brilliantly sung Dragon.

Clare Penfold is the Musical Director – an accomplished pit band brings polish to the score - and Katie Doran the Dance Captain.

CAODS will be celebrating 100 years in the autumn, with a production of Kipps – Half-a-Sixpence reworked and rebadged – with Ray Jeffery back in the director's chair.