

NODA Review

Through The Looking Glass

TAOS Musical Theatre

Friday 29th November 2013

Director: Phil Courage

Musical Director: Helen Heaton

Petra Schofield, District 10 representative writes:

Taking on a brand new musical is a great sign of commitment to the growing needs of your audience and cast members. It is hard to find groups prepared to take on the challenge of not having any bench mark productions to compare / contrast or in the worse cases – copy.

Being able to review something new is a rare treat and TAOS did not fail to get the best out of this show. It is at times a little too long and a couple of the numbers maybe do not extend the action enough and become a little laboured – however, none of this is about TAOS and their approach to the work. It was a most enjoyable production, the characters were well developed, the Jabberwock was a great creation and in all it struck a good balance between a bit of panto fun and great family entertainment.

The set designed by Phil Courage was very well conceived, appropriate for the space and enabled scene changes to be fluid and without fuss. It is often most successful when design and direction come together – being able to do both allowed the production to have a very strong vision.

The direction was also clear and made good use of the space and set, all characterisations were clear and focused – the show had a good sense of fun and great feeling of company participation. Having so many roles “doubled” provides a good challenge for the cast, enabling them to start work early in the pre dinner scene.

All performances were strong and the physicality of the creatures were convincing. Anabella Fairgrieve was a compelling and engaging Alice. Well sung and acted with conviction and thought; a very capable leading lady whom will no doubt get to play many principal roles.

Sarah Hanks as The Red Queen was a shrill and robust panto baddie; at times the sound was too over produced which made the number “You Must Know Something” far too loud at times to be comfortable. This was a good strong central performance.

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

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Patron: The Lord Lloyd Webber

Andrew Curtis as The White Knight was a truly lovely portrayal of a chivalrous chap who had humour and a heart of pure gold; very well sung capturing a great relationship with the young Alice.

Tweedle Dee (Kristie Blackwall) and Tweedle Dum (Ann Berry) were a good comic creation, complementing each other well without taking over, good fun and enjoyed by the audience.

Humpty Dumpty (Ally Moore) was again a well defined role, the set design helping the success of the number a good comic cameo.

The White King (Simon Chown) and The White Queen (Denise Harrison) were again good, rounded performances, an integral part of the bigger chain.

Poor Red King (Paul West) although being part of a hugely successful magic box, was a cameo that came into his own in the end stages of the production.

The whole company were excellent, there was not one foot out of place and the singing was very clear with good harmonies when needed. There were some outstanding numbers, mainly the Train Guard (Pete Grant) with the baffling but highly enjoyable song at the train station.

This was a good all round production, the costumes were good and the lighting design very effective as was the use of haze surrounding the jabberwok.

Helen Heaton, clearly had the band and vocalists under control and all sounded in place.

The sound system at times was unbalanced and voices were over produced, becoming too loud and did not “fit” into the small space. This was a hugely entertaining and enjoyable production and full credit goes to the committee for taking on a new show with such style, certainly putting a stamp on it. Thank you for the invitation, my children had a great time and if it works for an 8 & 10 yr old then it certainly means you are doing it right!

Very best wishes and I look forward to the next production – wishing you all a happy festive time and a hugely successful 2014.

Petra Schofield

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