



## ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company:                   **TROWBRIDGE AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY**

Name of Production:               **'SPAMALOT'**

Venue:                                 Arc Theatre, Trowbridge

Date:                                  7.30 pm, Friday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Adjudicator:                         Caroline Joy

Trowbridge Amateur Operatic Society's production galloped along beautifully. The theatre was packed with an enthusiastic audience. I love Monty Python and have seen both amateur and professional performances of this beloved show, and I was impressed by the calibre of acting, and this offering, directed by **Phil Courage**.

The creative use of the small stage was utilised well. The projections, set pieces, scenery, lighting and use of levels gave a sense of perspective, creating the illusion of a much bigger set. The setting had a fairy-tale quality to it with a multi-level castle, with a mesh upstage centre, revealing the more magical characters in a haze of mist.

The two towers stood at each edge, with clouds moving on a projection behind. This made for an effective backdrop, albeit at times the various projections could have been clearer. The stage crew and cast handled scene changes swiftly and quietly.

The costumes emphasised the characters inhabiting them, whether that be the rather dirty and dishevelled Patsy, to the glorious attire of the ethereal beings such as Lady of the Lake, to the GAY leopard print 'get-up' worn by Lancelot.

*Spamalot* is a dream and a headache for the costume department, ranging from comedy, dance, historical, trick and technical. The costume diversity is quite a challenge, so kudos to the wardrobe team; **Karen Grant, Joan Baggs** and **Sandra Tucker**.

The costumes, scenery and props (especially the Black Knight's limbs, the catapulted cow and the Trojan and killer rabbit) all added to mood and atmosphere, and made a full assault on the senses as we were whisked from one crazy realm to the next. The costume changes, the sound effects, and the dramatic differences in the lighting, and the use of gobos helped transport us to various locations. The lighting designed by **Tony Giddings** elevated this show technically, and took us back in time, to a mysterious period then we found ourselves in the 70's complete with disco ball!

All of this would not have been possible without all the hard work and endeavor behind the scenes, so a special mention must go to **Ollie Phipps** of SO!, **Emma Edwards, Nicky Runyard-Hunt** and **Conner Runyard-Hunt, Claire Borovac, Katie Hoole** and members of the society and **Naomi Jeffries**.

There were quite a few issues with microphone malfunctions and sound on the night, with actors being heard offstage, and discussions occurring above the audience and this was a little distracting, breaking the illusion at times.

Under the direction of Phil Courage the interpretation, characterisation and timing were first class. This was an intelligent production, and although *Spamalot* took place in a rather small venue, nothing was lost, the space was well utilised, which demonstrates the high standard of all those involved. It was great to see TAOS embracing the panto style by breaking down the fourth wall, updating their show with local references, and current affairs, which included projections of Donald Trump, Ozzie Osbourne and Prince Edward, with a brief appearance from Susan Boyle; this resonated well with the audience.

Phil's direction ensured the form, tone and silliness was suitably 'Pythonesque', and there were some laugh-out-loud moments on the way to Camelot. Everyone entered into the spirit and absurdities of *Spamalot* with irresistible delight and the actors were generous with each other, allowing each to shine.

The staging and blocking was well thought out, displaying a host of theatrical tricks and elements of farce with good comic timing and physical comedy. One of the funniest blocked scenes using these techniques involved Prince Herbert who was being kept in his room by his father, who was trying to instruct his daft guards. The Black Knight's fight with Arthur was particularly fun and inventive.

Diction and projection were clear and audible despite the sound issues, with many of the English and French accents easy to understand, which enabled all the humorous moments to be heard and enjoyed. The interaction with the audience was great fun and audience member Joan Francis was a star as the 'Best Peasant in Wiltshire'.

Phil was very ably assisted by Musical Director, Helen Heaton. Right from start of the overture we knew we were in for a surreal and crazy journey. The orchestra was well balanced with the singing throughout the performance. The singing and music was of a very high standard and the band had the right amount of depth to emphasise the subtext in the songs (not easy with a rather difficult score). The audience enjoyed the fun sounds and comedic effects erupting from the pit that accompanied the chorus, duets and solos in various songs, heightening the action. Spamalot is brimming with buoyant numbers and Helen made sure the whole cast were fully involved.

**Jamie Wright** created inventive routines and sequences, providing some escapist fun with his choreography. Some of the compositions were clever and original, whilst at the same time showcasing the different styles that are imitated in *Spamalot*. All the numbers appeared well drilled. We were treated to the Finnish Fisch Schlapping routine, the synchronised shapes of the Laker Girls, the tap dance routines, the umbrellas for 'Bright Side', Sir Robin's ensemble, 'Broadway' routine and a particular favourite was 'All Alone', which was reminiscent of an angst-ridden boy band video. The stunningly camp 'His Name is Lancelot', complete with well-known characters and fabulous costumes, was another highlight.

The action revolved around King Arthur, played by **Andrew Curtis**, who possessed a beautiful, Shakespearean delivery, adding gravitas to the production. Andrew had some fabulous dialogue and songs, all delivered with an earnest authority, which made this a funny, refreshing and original interpretation. His characterisation came through during the number, 'I'm All Alone', showing us a very self-obsessed individual with no empathy for others. Even though played by Graham Chapman in the original Holy Grail film, many theatre 'Arthurs' try to emulate John Cleese, or make Arthur more exaggerated; however Andrew made this role his own and was all the more amusing for it.

Arthur's faithful dejected sidekick Patsy, was played with pathos by **Claire Warren**, whose characterisation made us empathise with her. It was played with composure and spontaneity. Claire physically inhabited Patsy and her use of facial expressions and pauses, actions and reactions were well-timed. Arthur and Patsy displayed good repartee and made a great double act, keeping the pace 'clip-clopping' along nicely. The penultimate number, 'I'm All Alone' was very funny as was 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life', which had the audience singing along. An exemplary player of coconuts as well!

**Ashley Watson** threw himself into a whole host of characters, from Not Dead Fred, Fisch Dancer to Dennis who transforms into narcissistic Sir Galahad, complete with gorgeous salon hair. However, it was his performance as an exceedingly effeminate, hair flicking and pouting Prince Herbert that stole the show. Ashley possessed a good sense of comedy, both in delivery and expression. This was very enjoyable.

The Lady of the Lake, portrayed by **Leonie Macaslin**, not only gave a superb vocal performance (a real powerhouse of a voice, versatile, and with an extensive range) and ignited the stage with her personality and stage presence; she also displayed

some fine comic timing as the temperamental ethereal diva. Leonie looked beautiful and made the demanding score appear effortless. *Spamalot* gave Leonie the opportunity to sing blues, ballads, jazz and scat. 'The Song That Goes Like This' (with Sir Galahad), was belted out brilliantly as a mixture of a ballad and a comedy routine and was applauded quite rightly so when she hit that top note and sustained it. 'The Diva's Lament' was perfection personified, and left the audience breathless.

This production of *Spamalot* not only enabled the chorus to shine in various cameos, but also provided a range of characters for the main cast to perform. I have never witnessed such expressive eyes as those belonging to **Michelle Hole**. Michelle had the audience bursting with laughter, myself included. The eyes popped out as the leader of 'the Knights That Say Ni', and kudos for her work on the stilts! The eyes then narrowed for the French Taunter. The voices and accents were delivered with excellent comic timing and modulation. Michelle also showcased her skills as a dancer playing one of the Laker Girls. Michelle has naturally funny bones and showcased some excellent interpretations of all the characters.

The recklessly brave Sir Lancelot, played by **Paul West**, displayed versatility and skill as In and Out Knight. The disco scene has imprinted an image in my mind that will take time to fade! Paul's voice was deep and rich and worked well in comparison to his inner feelings.

The often-soiled Sir Robin, with his strawberry blonde bob and pretty looks, was played by **Tim Hobbs** with a nervy charisma. His rendition of 'You Won't Succeed on Broadway,' was a spectacle and Tim's diction, energy and spontaneity delivered the witty lyrics with technical perfection.

**Mike Holden** shone in his various roles as the slightly confused and charming Sir Bedevere, tragic Concorde, Monk and Black Knight. Mike's incarnation as the Black Knight was comic gold with a suitably dead-pan delivery and he displayed some fine stagecraft skills as he was slowly de-limbed.

The Knights of the Round Table each shone as individuals; however they worked well together and bounced off each other effectively.

**Tim Knott's** various characters were good fun; however, it was his very Pythonesque Tim the Enchanter, that was fittingly bizarre and made me laugh out loud.

The slightly maniacal fixed smiles of the leaping and bounding minstrels, as they told the tale of 'Brave Sir Robin', was one of the many enjoyable moments.

The excellent supporting cast of **Richard Rawlings, Alan Rutland, Ann Barry, Naomi Jeffries, Connie Harris, Christina Barnes, Lesley Chapman, Pete Grant** were busy either laid out on the plague cart, in the French army, being a knight, an historian, fan dancing, fish slapping, being a gruff Northern father (hilarious as the manly, Regal Father of the impossibly gay Prince Herbert), or the nagging Mother and Knights of Ni.

The cast possessed a good sense of timing played with conviction in every part, not only exhibiting a real talent portraying a variety of characters, but also singing, dancing and physical comedy (a quadruple threat).

All the cast, ensemble, musicians and crew's commitment and passion for this show was evident to see and this enabled the pace and energy to flow throughout the performance.

This was a fast, manic, polished and a fun production that never lost its meaning and purpose, assuring that there is a ray of hope or glimmer of light in the darkness.

*Many thanks for a warm welcome and your kind hospitality, and I hope to see you again in the future.*