



Society : Barnes Community Players
Production : Sleeping Beauty
Date : November 28th, 2018
Venue : Kitson Hall
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It was a pleasure to have returned and visited Barnes Community Players for their 2018 Christmas Pantomime - 'Sleeping Beauty'. Thanks to Amanda Harker for her kind invitation and for the chat during the interval - good to finally meet at last.

A central ethos for this society is charity and in the raising of much needed funds for local community groups. I am certain that both the 1st Barnes Rangers Guides and Castelnau Community Centre will be most grateful for the support raised during this production. This practice is a fabulous example of community involvement and one to be greatly admired.

Spread over a period of 118 years, 'Sleeping Beauty' is a timeless story for the whole family to enjoy. When King 'Bertie' Norbert and Queen 'Dottie' Dorothy arrange a christening party for the royal Princess Aurora, they could never have imagined that the evil fairy Carabosse would crash the event and curse their beautiful baby daughter...

For me, pantomime season is all about the glamour, glitz, colour, fun, a modern musical score, plenty of bad puns and local references. Add to the mix an enthusiastic cast and you have the ingredients for a thoroughly enjoyable show. Where at all possible I do try to avoid reviewing shows on Opening Night but I'm afraid this was my only chance to attend and was simply unavoidable. Having said that, I left feeling 'Sleeping Beauty' had definitely met my expectations and that the show was a success.

Congratulations must first be given to Symeon Wade and Francesca Stone who, as Co-Directors, brought 'Sleeping Beauty' to Barnes. It was clear that the amount of time and energy spent organising this production had been considerable. However, not content with directing, and also taking on various backstage duties, Francesca also filled the role of Princess Aurora!

Amanda Harker brought her experience to the show as Choreographer ensuring all dance and movement was of a good standard and the use. The central catwalk area brought the action closer to the audience and well used by the cast. It was the zombies, and their flashlight dance in the dark, that was well executed and highly effective.

Terry Oakes played King Norbert well and took pleasure in entertaining the audience with a string of bad panto jokes! I loved the unashamed 'plugs' for those local shops/organizations, who'd supported the event, together with numerous references to Barnes.

Rodger Hayward Smith took on the challenge of panto dame Queen Dorothy and delivered the high-energy and 'over the top' performance required here. With suitable gusto, Rodger strove to immediately involve the audience and again made numerous local references which the audience enjoyed. Terry and Rodger worked well together and were always a reliable source of amusement in their roles.

Having previously admired Francesca Stone's performance in 'Say Something Happened', it was a pleasure to see her take on a completely different challenge – this time as Princess Aurora. Whilst I wasn't surprised by Francesca's performance and acting abilities, it was her lovely singing voice that caught my attention this time.

In only his 3rd show Steve Bannell delivered a solid performance as Prince Orlando (both as the grandfather and then great-great grandson). Good diction and stage presence. Steve and Francesca provided the romantic element to 'Sleeping Beauty' and worked well together throughout the show. Their enthusiasm and confidence were a delight to watch.

Annie Collenette made a loveable Kitty and the audience quickly warmed to her character. Well done for maintaining this throughout. The final revelation Kitty could speak went down very well indeed...

Jill Turetzky certainly delivered as the wicked fairy Carabosse and extracted plenty of boos from the audience on every appearance. Jill's movements and voice were excellent with her evil threat, whilst bathed in a green light, was very realistic.

Julie Smith was a favourite as Spindleshanks, Carabosse's sidekick, and certainly appeared to enjoy the role. Demonstrating some good character acting and humour, this was a well-thought-out performance.

Alexa Bushell performed well as Billy and was both engaging and a likeable character. Marie Bushell did well as Fairy Peaceful, Carabosse's counterpart, and elicited plenty of support and cheers from the audience. Andrew Rapley and Patrick Van den Bergh both appeared to enjoy their cameo roles as Chorus Fairies.

Phyllis O'Kelly, Viv Wilson, Marion Earle, Robin Eastwood, Martin Parsley and Fergus O'Kelly all provided enthusiastic support as Palace Servants, Courtiers, Zombies and Villagers.

Audience involvement is an expected part of the panto experience. The distribution of confetti for the Royal Wedding was a great idea as was the sing-a-long competition. Possibly bringing children onto stage, at another time, would have increased audience participation further?

Set Design/Construction was managed by Francesca Stone and her team of helpers. It was obvious just how much work had gone into the production of this set – especially the painting and it looked fabulous. Using the front curtain to mask changes and/or change background scenery worked well and ensured continuous action and minimal delays. The central walkway was very effective and the

addition of snow/frost cutouts around the stage added a nice feeling - as did the Christmas trees and extra hall lighting.

Stage Manager Sally Copland (assisted by Jane Gough and crew) had a busy evening keeping the action moving. Suffice to say that there were no lengthy delays and the action appeared flow – always a sign that things are under control backstage. This might not have always been the case, but the audience was well entertained and wasn't aware of any 'backstage issues'.

Pennie Bayliss, Darroll Blake and Marion Earle combined their efforts to manage Costumes which were both varied and of a good standard. Francesca Stone and Sally Copland jointly managed Props which again were of a good standard and appropriate for the setting.

Lighting was managed by Martin Walton. A few early 'teething problems' were quickly resolved and for the most part all actors were properly lit when required. The use of colour lighting was effective and certainly added to the atmosphere.

Sound was managed by Martin Spriggs and for the most part all speaking was clearly audible. Whilst certain cast members were individually mic'd, I did feel that there were instances where good voice projection would have benefited however. Kitson Hall lacks full technical features and sound quality is always going to be a challenge in this environment. Unfortunately, this was most noticeable during the singing which was often let down by the sound capability.

Patrick Van den Bergh was responsible for an interesting show Programme that contained plenty of information for the audience to enjoy. The poster design competition, ultimately won by Maggie Conway-Hughes from Barnes Primary, was an excellent idea to publicise the panto throughout the local community.

I am sure that the audience left, like me, in the festive spirit and having enjoyed an evening's entertainment with Barnes Community Players. Congratulations again to everyone involved in putting this production together and thanks for inviting me along. I look forward to visiting again next March and enjoying the three Alan Ayckbourn plays scheduled for production.

Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year!

Des Wilby
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