

ALADDIN

WICKHAM BISHOPS DRAMA GROUP

Performed in Wickham Bishops Village Hall,

January 9, 2014,

Director - Jack Williams, Musical Director - Thomas Duchan

With backdrops worthy of Gerald Scarfe himself, particularly Twankey's laundry with caricatures of giant laundry baskets, the stage was always colourful and interesting. I noted that the side flats were generally plain which worked well when the lighting effects were exotic (eg the arrival of the genie) but seemed "flat" when the lighting was plain vanilla. Grey tabs would perhaps work just as well and may provide extra options when you want to alternate painted flats with technical lighting. Costumes and all technical effects were of a very high standard. If anything I noticed that the use of sound effects was much bolder than usual, with extra volume and many more sound cues. Genies, thunder and lightning, grating stones (the cave) and all sorts of other sounds provided genuine interest and excitement. The one effect that perhaps could have been amplified was the giant TV. I thought this would light up and look like a changing room mirror but seemed to remain a dull wooden frame throughout, detracting somehow from a fundamentally good idea. The band has expanded, with the cello adding a richness of timbre in the lower register and details being added by violins and ukulele. This worked well and the balance of sound between stage and band was probably as good as it can be. I didn't notice a drummer and wonder whether this instrument, if it was indeed missing, would have added some attack. I wasn't as familiar with the songs as perhaps some might have been and the choice of audience song was not exactly guaranteed to have us competing with our neighbours across the aisle. Nevertheless, this song was at least mercifully brief and the cast decided to cut their losses early on.

The sound levels of dialogue seemed to vary considerably from individual to individual. Whether this was a function of being miked or not miked I don't know but I do believe that many characters could project their voices more and improve upon their diction. A mike can amplify poor diction but it cannot translate it into English. Having said that I could certainly follow what was being said and there were several principals who were excellent at delivering well-modulated dialogue - Aladdin (Laura Kittle) and Graham Pipe (Widow Twankey) being the best examples. In fact these two characters delivered really good performances, with good stage presence, great audience rapport and excellent timing. The junior chorus, seemingly split into teenage girls and much younger boys and girls, provided colourful and enjoyable dance interludes. Their costumes and props, including parasols and the wonderful dragon, were lovely. I suspect the older girls could have thrown themselves into at least one upbeat dance routine; what we did see, although good, were rather sedate numbers that perhaps didn't best suit teenage temperaments.

Overall, Wickham Bishops Drama Group continues to deliver an enjoyable pantomime with strong production values that, if anything, are getting stronger. Some more work on projection and characterisation could yield some valuable results. WBDG is already one of the best pantomime groups in my area but I suspect the local audience has little to compare with other than the professional troupes. In terms of venue and technicals the producers can do little more; from hereon in it is down to the company.

Reviewer - Stewart Adkins

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