

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Performed by Wickham Bishops Drama Club at Wickham Bishops Village Hall, 7th January 2016

Director – Michelle Bacon

The pantomime at Wickham Bishops has always been differentiated by the quality of its sets and costumes; this year was no different. It was wonderful just to sit back and enjoy a visual spectacle where there were no compromises. A wonderfully complementary lighting plot set off the stage to great effect with some really striking tableaux, particularly when the whole cast was on stage. Special mention must be made of the tree costumes and spectacular head-dresses of the woodland sprites or dryads – really effective. Even the relatively bare stage for the Queen's chamber was made to look spooky with cobweb lighting effects and the huge mirror. I have no idea how the mirror worked but it was also very effective.

The incidental sound effects and technicals generally were very well timed, with good synchronicity between stage action and effect; this is not easy to do. The musical backing was from click tracks rather than a live band but apart from an occasional lack of continuity, where actors were waiting for the music to begin for a split second, this worked well. With experience a cast will learn to continue their action (while listening attentively) until their cue to sing, thus filling in the gaps. I understand that the lack of a musical director, through no fault of the club, did mean that the singing was to some extent neglected and that the less confident singers did not benefit from experienced tuition. That was a great shame for the actors but did not mar the audience's enjoyment of what was still an entertaining show.

The script, by Alan Frayn, was very funny albeit corny at times. The running gag throughout- the two level technical talk by Quill and Scribbles - was very clever and the jokes from Chuckles and Edna Bucket kept the audience smiling and chuckling throughout. Slurp's method acting, based on Elephant Man presumably, was of a very high standard and full marks for keeping his character despite some tendency to corpsing from those around him. The blend of new and familiar faces within the cast was very good to see. The pairing of great newcomer Sam Knott's Chuckles with Jack Williams' Edna Bucket was always guaranteed to make us laugh out loud. More subtle but still very funny were the legal duo of Ian Lodge's Quill and Linda Burgess's Scribbles. Delivering flawless lines with a beautiful accent was Jane Smith as Fairy Fortune – a great debut. Other first-timers, Natasha Newman as Snow White, James Bacon as Prince Ferdinand and Moira Monti as Queen Avarice, all did well in their respective roles. It was good to see people of the right age and look take these parts; this bodes well for the future.

Another beauty of this production is the large number of roles available for young people, with the seven dwarfs being played by pre-teenage youngsters. With several songs, some choreography and dialogue these parts provided great stage experience. Other young people were able to take ensemble roles as woodland creatures, fairies and miscellaneous animals. Well done to all.

Michelle Bacon, director of the 2016 pantomime, may have experienced more drama and less club than she was hoping for but the end result was one to be proud of. I am sure that larger, more vocal, audiences than Thursday's will bring out the very best in this production.

Reviewer – Stewart Adkins
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