



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Beaufort Players
Production : "The Little Mermaid"
Date : 25th November 2022
Venue : Church of the Ascension Hall, Beaufort Rd, Ealing
Report by : C Baynes, Regional Rep, Region 9, NODA, London

Show Report

NODA – Be inspired by Amateur Theatre

It was a pleasure to deputise for Mike Smith and review your delightful pantomime "The Little Mermaid" as this is one of my favourite Hans Christian Anderson fairy stories. Despite gloom mongers complaining that the original story is one of suffering and self-sacrifice I like to take it on its face value and enjoy the modern versions which present it as a colourful story in which the 'girl' eventually gets her 'prince,' where 'good' prevails and 'evil' is banished and along the way some fantastic characters are found living in the ocean – what's not to love? This is certainly how the playwright **Alan Robinson** sees the story. His brainwave of making the 'Dame' the Captain of a pirate ship was a brilliant twist creating the opportunity for a standard pantomime format. The 'princess' in this story was the mermaid Coralee, daughter of King Neptune. The King tries to protect his daughter by setting her boundaries. However Coralee is adventurous and is constantly trying to escape these restrictions whilst her friends Starfish and Turtle keep a watchful eye on her. The 'Dame' Captain Scurvy Knickers is kept in check by his right hand 'man' Bosun Bilge and his 'left hand' pet rat Squeakers. The wicked witch is Neptune's evil twin sister Nerissa – born just a few minutes too late to have been ruler of the seas and spends her whole time trying to right this 'wrong', helped by her henchmen Jelly and Urchin. The last essential elements for the panto are the Prince (Arik here) and his heartless mother (Queen Canute) and they are to be found on board the pirate ship – which they have chartered to take them to the home of his intended bride - an ugly princess who possesses prize mangoes! On the way we encounter sirens, hidden treasure, and a sea dragon to complete the whole crazy pantomime experience.

PRODUCTION & TECHNICAL TEAM

This delightful creation by your director **Alan Robinson** produces so many glorious opportunities for ludicrous outcomes and audience participation with a sprinkling of joyful songs along the way. As Alan remarked in the programme he had a dedicated cast and crew who helped to bring this panto together to entertain us royally in these dismal times. Alan was ably helped with the direction by **Krystyna Kobiak** as she took on the responsibility of setting Act 1 for him. Krystyna also took on the heavy task of costume co-ordinator. Pantomime often stands or falls on the standard of the costumes and here the 'wardrobe' was brilliant – from pirates to sea creatures – costumes were perfect and identified the characters well. The identifying feature for the starfish was a star head-dress but the orange floating sleeveless coat completed the picture nicely; the turtle had the essential shell on his back with ideally coloured top and trousers – perfect. I liked the mermaid's shimmering/scale-like long fold over skirt creating her tail most effectively. The purple-tulle dress for the jellyfish with a big round hat and the spikey green and white shell-like barrel shaped dress for the sea urchin were also perfect. Pincer oven gloves with the red trousers and the sideways gait was a brainwave for Snippy as was the crazy headgear for Anemone and Granny Clam. All the classic Pirate outfits, Nerissa's black

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and purple dress and all the brilliant dresses and wigs for the 'dame' completed a superb wardrobe line-up.

The colourful set was so cleverly designed and put together that it was suitable for the action of the whole panto. Set design and construction was in the capable hands of **Ana Bretes, Alan Robinson & Thomas Cobb & Beaufort team**. We had a ship's mast with the large Skull & Cross Bones, Jolly Roger, a huge clam shell, coral reef, cave, seaweed, sunken treasure chest – what more can you ask. There was frequent use of a bubble machine to good effect. The lighting was suitably coloured with additional fairy light displays and disco style filters used when relevant. These lighting effects were efficiently managed by **Pete Balls** while the sound effects and the music were similarly efficiently operated by **Roger Dishley**. **Elaine O'Sullivan** was attentive on the 'book' ensuring that the action did not stall.

Stage managers **Ana Bretes & Rachel-lee Mackenzie** kept the proceedings moving along with great pace – despite all the unpredictable deviations and spontaneous variations that can occur in panto.

Your programme names a long list of make-up artists who contributed significantly to the wonderful individual character appearances – from the sequined eyed pirates to Neptune's & Nerissa's face art. Well done.

Throughout the panto there were several songs nicely sung by all – in particular Prince Arik and Coralee, Some of these involved dance moves, which added to the enjoyment. **Alan Robinson & Krystyna Kobiak** arranged and choreographed these numbers and Jane Quill coached the singing. Well done all.

PERFORMANCES

Most pantos heavily depend on the performance of the Dame and this one was no exception. Captain Scurvy Knickers was the first character we meet and together with Bosun Bilge they explain the purpose of their voyage. **Thomas Cobb** was superb as the 'dame' and had great control of the proceedings – secure in his business despite the spontaneity of audience interventions. We felt we were in safe hands. His Bosun Bilge played by **Eileen Laird** was similarly confident, dependable, quick-witted and convincing, working well with the rat Squeakers and translating his rather brutal comments with effective sarcasm.

Also travelling on the pirate ship was Queen Canute played with delightful venom by **Mary Hill**. She is a rather fierce ruler taking her 'son' Prince Arik to meet his intended fiancée - a princess with impressive mangoes and a beard! But this thigh slapping Principal 'boy' Prince Arik is not impressed and wants to find his own wife and marry for love. **Julia Marques** took on this role with joy and conviction – a particularly enjoyable performance. I especially liked his dreamy, faraway, almost hypnotic expression after he meets Coralee.

The team of pirates included **Jonathan Simmons, Diana Dishley, Joana Coelho and Loris Christinat** all of whom worked well in the ensemble activities. The soloist pirate "Salty" the prophet of doom I thought was most entertaining. **Kate Martin** took on this role most earnestly thereby increasing the humour and in addition she sang and danced particularly well in all the routines.

Gemma Robinson was the perfect choice for the delicate mermaid with the ethereal voice that is stolen from her by the wicked sea witch. Her zest for adventure she played most credibly especially when she saved the life of the landlubber – Prince Arik. She worked well with her Prince and with her two companions Starfish & Turtle. **Scarlett Stevenson** (Starfish) in fine voice sang with enthusiasm and genuine concern for her mermaid friend. **Tom Parker** (Turtle - Coralee's other companion) also sang well and was convincingly solicitous – keen to keep the mermaid safe. This duo worked well keeping up a good momentum throughout the panto and both of them were obviously enjoying themselves.

Another unlikely pairing that worked well was Anemone (played by **Mujtaba Walji**) and Granny Clam (played by **Ann Marques**). They both had great fun displaying their different oceanic characteristics with much humour.

The baddy duo (Nerissa's henchmen) Jelly (**Emma O'Toole**) and Urchin (**Danae Brandon**) were a hoot with perfect villainous intent and tongue-in-cheek delivery they both sang and danced well and suitably in character.

Coralee's father King Neptune was nicely played by **Peter Coles**. A rather distant father to Coralee he does not understand her desire to explore beyond the confines of their home – although we learn, at the end, that he had similar desires in his youth (apparently even marrying the human who became Captain Scurvy Knickers!!) However when Coralee is trapped by his wicked sister, Nerissa, Neptune is prepared to sacrifice his kingdom for her safety. Neptune's aide was Snippy aptly played by **Chris Burns** – I loved his constant sideways crab-like gait.

Nerissa is permanently plotting to take over her brother's underwater kingdom and she seizes her opportunity when Coralee recklessly desires to be with Prince Arik and is willing to part with her magic shell and her voice in exchange for her legs and a life on land. **Elaine Cobb** played this role most successfully, singing and acting the wicked witch with relish.

Joana Coelho & Loris Christinat donned the Sea Dragon suit after their original stint on the pirate ship. They worked well in unison as this animal, dancing around the stage with gay abandon.

The more senior ladies **Diana Dishley, Elaine O'Sullivan & Krystyna Kobiak** had fun making a brief appearance as sirens (aka Beyonce's "Single Ladies") taunting the pirates.

Beaufort Players are obviously a very warm friendly company and everyone associated with this production plus the audience seemed to be enjoying themselves.

I am sure that you will have great fun presenting this to the children on your matinees and there is no doubt that it will be as well received then as it was on the first Friday night that I attended.

Thank you all – onstage and backstage - for your hard work and dedication and keeping amateur theatre alive and well.

Carole Baynes