

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

by Lewis Carroll (adapted by Don Carroll)

If a scoring system had been in operation for the Beaufort Players' latest production, "Alice in Wonderland" on 23-25 November, I reckon the costumes and make-up deserved 11 out of 10 and the music and scenery both 10/10. It was a lively entertaining production in which every scene was a deftly-lit delight to the eye.

Gemma Breakell made a delightfully credible Alice - suitably pretty with long blonde hair and always charming. As she roamed through Wonderland, the extraordinary creatures she met all looked amazing thanks to colourful, imaginative and often very funny costumes. Designing and making them must have taken many hours but Krystyna Kobiak and the 'Beaufort Sew-and-sews' as they called themselves can be sure that every stitch was well worthwhile.

Alice's adventures - stolen jam tarts, croquet, cries of "Off with his head" and so on - took her everywhere from the White Rabbit's house to the Palace and even the seaside. Each location was enchantingly portrayed by the set designers, Alan Robinson and Gary Burgess, and the construction team led by Ted Adcock and Lee Boyle, who showed real flair for shape and colour. Adding to the fun, Doug Sellwood provided splendidly jaunty music which achieved maximum effect by always being impeccably timed.

To have been able to field a cast of twenty is a measure of the Beaufort Players' current healthy state. Everyone gave a lively performance, though sometimes the full over-the-top exuberance that a pantomime needs was somewhat lacking. Perhaps a little more rehearsal or a stiff gin beforehand would have helped, or maybe they just needed to play to the back row of the audience rather than the front.

However there was no doubt that the wonderfully arrogant Queen (Esther Holt) majestically earned the hearty boos and hisses that greeted her appearances. Indeed she and the very jolly Mad Hatter (Russell Gillman) were also definitely in the 10/10 category. They both seemed so real that you quite forgot they were actors. Matt Tylianakis as the Cheshire Cat, Chris Sinclair as the March Hare, Alan Robinson as the Knave and James King as the Frog (whose bug-eyed costume was a masterpiece) also gave particularly noteworthy performances.

The various songs were commendably well performed, helped by being crisp and to the point, and the traditional audience participation was well handled, avoiding the trap of being too long or self-indulgent.

Altogether the two directors, Diana Dishley and Elaine O'Sullivan, deserve great credit for staging such a successful production that was slick and well choreographed throughout. Judging by the Saturday matinee when I saw it, they clearly succeeded in entertaining a very wide age-group from tots to grandparents.

Smooth front-of-house arrangements, including efficient ticketing, welcoming ushers, good refreshments and an informative well-illustrated programme, also helped to ensure the audience's enjoyment.

John Harrison