



Be inspired by amateur theatre

## **Woodfield Entertainers - BABES IN THE WOOD - December 2015**

Having reviewed this Pantomime only from the DVD of the production and without the advantage of a programme, I am unable to give as full a comment on certain matters as I would have wished. Among these are lighting, makeup, more details of some costumes and the effective key-board player whose name I do not know. However, the good quality DVD was a great help and I am able to give, I feel, a fairly accurate opinion of the performers and the show itself.

The story of the show is, of course, well known and needs no explanation from me. Opening traditionally with The Fairy, played by Cara Turner, resplendent in long pinkish dress and long blonde hair with one or two flowers and the requisite wand whilst speaking confidently and clearly in the usual rhyming style, Cara provided a good opening to the show.

Maid Marian, played by George Margetts, possessed attack and energy and her acting was very good throughout.

Nurse Molly Coddle (the Dame part) was played in heels - which inhibited his movement somewhat - by Kenny Menet-Hawkins, starting in a long pink dress and wig. As required, Kenny did change costumes throughout, as ideally the Dame wears a new costume for every entrance. Though he certainly had the character, his portrayal was rather too feminine for my liking. The best dames are a man in a frock and a wig - but very much a man. A striking figure who towered over the rest of the cast, he had clearly worked hard on the part.

The Sheriff of Nottingham, Neil Edwards, was impressive throughout, carrying much presence and authority. Unfortunately, his many entrances bar the first entrance were made onto the platform rather than the stage itself which entailed him coming on from an offstage right position. I do realise that sensible use was made throughout the show of the useful platform, to minimise the lack of depth on stage proper. But having only a down right ramp up to the platform prevents an entrance from stage left, which causes problems in panto, where the evil character is required to enter and exit stage left. Some thought as to how this may be organised in future pantomimes should be given. It is imperative in Panto that the "evil" personality never crosses past the centre from stage left, since the whole point of pantomime is good triumphing over evil. This was a serious error to my way of thinking. The Fairy did stay stage right thankfully.

The entrance of Dangerous Dave (aka Dozy, Dense and Dingo among others) played by the supremely confident Tim Waters in a real gor-blimey costermonger's voice enhanced the show. The late, great Arthur Askey upon his first entrance was known to say "this is where the show picks up, folks". Nobody could say that Tim underplayed the part, to his great credit! Dangerous Dave's ambition was to join Robin Hood's gang in which he finally succeeded.

Robin Hood, played with great panache and authority by the clearly experienced Hannah Chapman, suitably dressed in Lincoln green and, carrying out the traditional thigh slapping, gave a highly impressive performance throughout. Moreover, she had a very good singing voice and I would be surprised if she had not had dancing training, so well did she move.

Robin's merry men comprised:

Little John (Simon Gadd),  
Friar Tuck (Graham Thorburn )  
Will Scarlet (Sandra Graves)  
Emma Dale (Amalee Gamache)

They were onstage in many scenes but were clearly less experienced than many of the above principals. Friar Tuck could have been more effectively padded than he was - he was naturally rather slim and the references to his girth fell rather flat.

The babes Pip and Penny were well played by Thomas Thorburn and Millie Barnes. Both carried the necessary vulnerability and spoke their lines clearly.

The Sheriffs "incompetent" henchmen, Block and Tackle, were Elaine Denny, complete with top hat and Jenny Gamache. They were rather like the tramps in Burlington Bertie but this is in no way a criticism of their costumes which were right for the characters. The two rubber guitars were a nice touch. Their characters were both archetypal "losers", but both were very much winners where performance was concerned.

The sets were simple, but fairly basic and rather too much was staged in front of the curtain, though I liked the amusingly named Mr. Scraggend, the Butcher's shop in the Nottingham Square set. There were some nice innovations though, Robin's gang being in turn robbed by Block and Tackle, though eventually rumbled and also the school maths scene. The kitchen "slosh" scene involving eggs, flour, especially when flour was piped on to Tackle, "ingreedyants" and general mayhem was done most effectively and with noticeably more pace than some other scenes.

The archery contest between Robin and the Sheriff rather suffered from a very obvious lack of arrows. That the Sheriff's bowstring broke mattered little and it was well disguised once broken. Despite the small stage area though, surely some way of attaching arrows to the target could have been found? The arrows amusing and effective sound effect did somewhat compensate though. I did, however, appreciate the way that Dangerous Dave announced the Sheriff in true boxing style, which was highly effective and amusing.

I thought the "behind you" scene with Dave in a helmet was rather thrown away. In a forest some wild animal, a bear perhaps, would have been more frightening. The behind you scene is an integral and important scene in panto and this one fell a little flat.

The songsheet presented by Nurse Molly and Dangerous Dave to the Robin Hood song was effective enough in its way but why were no children asked onstage, as is customary? Some sweets were thrown and handed round but I really do think some effort should have been made to invite at least a few children on stage, despite the limited space. This is an important part of an effective panto and it suffered from a lack of kids. I could hear and see plenty of enthusiastic children in the audience who would have come if asked.

Costumes in general were of reasonable standard, though a wedding scene for Robin and Marian would have benefited from new costumes, at least for them. That being said, I realise very well that budgets have to be met and that may well explain the reason.

The audience seemed to enjoy the production and there was plenty of interaction in general. Overall the director and choreographer Mel Schmidt provided a most enjoyable production.