

Sardines Magazine Review of Cinderella

Rodgers and Hammerstein

society/company: Witham Amateur Operatic Society

performance date: 22 Oct 2018

venue: Public Hall Witham

reviewer: Michael GRAY (Sardines review)

No, not a premature panto, but a rare, and very welcome, chance to enjoy the musical Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote for CBS.

It's given a splendid staging by WAOS; Claire Carr's lively direction, and her classy choreography, guide the audience through the familiar fairytale, and, despite some lengthy passages of dialogue, sustain the magical mood.

In this version, the Fairy Godmother acts as narrator as well as motivator: a superb performance from Emma Loring, genial, glamorous, owning the stage and using her lovely singing voice to make the most of her numbers, including the Music In You which closes the show.

Not all the character roles leap off the page quite so successfully, but there is strength and star quality where it counts. Aimee Hart is a classic Cinders – demure, pure, with just enough determination to gate-crash the shoe-fitting scene. Perfect vocal work too, both in her solos – the winningly charming My Own Little Corner, expressively danced with check cloth and broom – and duetting with her handsome hipster Prince Chris, Dannii Carr, successfully suggesting the heir apparent's complex character. Constance Lawton is the evil stepmother, with Rhianna Howard and Hatty Gribben as her “extraordinary” daughters. All three delightfully done, the ugly sisters cosseted and corseted in their gloriously extravagant gowns. Joy and Grace shine in their Act Two duet, too.

The songs are tuneful, if not especially memorable; some of it seems to be looking forward to The Sound of Music. The Sweetest Sounds, by far the best thing musically, was added for a later revival, recycled from No Strings. But MD Thomas Duchan, with his sizeable orchestra, bring out the best in this luxuriant Broadway score. Covering scene changes well, too, except, bizarrely, for the longest and most complex ...

The ensemble makes a fine vocal chorus, as well as filling the stage with movement and colour: the market-place knees-up [with trombone support from the pit], the Waltz with its balletic lifts, the all-too-brief black-and-white Servants' Dance interlude, the Lovely Night sequence, and the stunning moment when Cinderella the Princess arrives late to the ball, the throng parts and the lovers' eyes meet across a crowded room.

The garden gauze is a perfect backdrop for the love duet; the auditorium is cleverly used for the search sequence. The all-important transformation scene is simply but very persuasively

done, with a gorgeous coach and horses, and the finale, with its beautiful frocks, is a visual delight.

A good old-fashioned show, staged with affection and style, and a perfect night out for the packed audience, including not a few princesses, who eagerly queued up at the end to photo-bomb the royal couple.

WAOS will bring us more fairies next April: a new version of that G&S staple, Iolanthe, set in clubland, with the promise of chrome and cocktails ...