

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2018-19

WAOS

“Cinderella” directed by Claire Carr

Adjudicated by Andrew Hodgson & Jenny Burke

23rd October 2018

Dawn King also attended on Friday 26th October and her comments noted.

INTRODUCTION

WAOS are to be commended for, once again, daring to be different and presenting another musical show that will be new to their audience. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s delightful musical version of the classic fairy tale, “Cinderella”, started life as television special starring Julie Andrews in the 1950’s. It was subsequently re-made twice, and this version is based on the 1990’s teleplay. The score, although not vintage R and H, is charming and serves the story very well. Although clearly not a pantomime, the script-and production- contained an excellent fusion of romance and comedy.

FRONT OF HOUSE/PUBLICITY

As always at this address, the F.O.H. team were friendly and efficient. We were given excellent seats with a clear view of the stage. The usual range of refreshments was available, and the raffle was conducted with efficient elegance by Patsy Page. The glossy, attractively designed programme was packed with information about the show, production, cast and crew. The Tuesday night performance was well-attended and there was a real buzz of anticipation from the audience before the show began.

SETTING/PROPS/STAGE MANAGEMENT

My companion commented that the show looked like a children’s story book come to life! It did! This was reflected in the scenery. Beautifully painted cut-outs were positioned against black tabs, with the village, mansion, palace etc all solidly represented within the confines of the Public Hall stage. A star-lit sky backdrop added to the romantic, and magical, ambiance of the production. Furniture, and a lot of excellent props, really added to the overall visual impact, and the “Transformation” scene, with the beautiful coach revealed, was every bit as enchanting as we wanted it to be! Stage Management was really smoothly and efficiently executed, although there were one or two occasions, such as the positioning of the slipper on the steps, when the cohesion between stage management and lighting was slightly out of kilter but we are sure this issue was quickly resolved in subsequent performances. Overall, very well done to all involved!

LIGHTING/SOUND/ SPECIAL EFFECTS

The lighting design was imaginative and magical, with a very good use of spotlights and blinders in the transformation reveal. Lighting operation was well-timed (apart from the previously mentioned issue) and tightly focussed. Sound and special effects (such as the puff of smoke that heralded the Fairy Godmother’s entrance) were also excellent and slickly achieved. We want to praise the amplification system used; the

balance between singers and orchestra was spot on, we could hear every word of the lyrics clearly and at an appropriate volume. It was an object lesson that some other groups we visit could learn from! Again, a huge well done for this aspect of the show!

COSTUMES

The costumes for this production definitely had the WOW factor! They were stunning! It looked as though a lot of money had been spent on them but it was well worth it, adding immeasurably towards bringing the story to life. The materials were rich and varied; the colours were vibrant and very well co-ordinated, as in the beautiful wedding finale and the ball scene. Cinderella's ball gown was gorgeous and the Fairy Godmother, in white and silver, glittered and sparkled on her first entrance. The all-important magic slippers were just right! Good wigs and make-up complemented the overall effect, with every character clearly established in terms of their appearance. Congratulations!

MUSIC/CHOREOGRAPHY

After a slightly tentative overture, Musical Director Thomas Duchan's orchestra produced a lush sound and offered accomplished and supportive accompaniment to the cast, setting a good pace throughout the show. I have already commended the balance of sound, and the quality of singing from the principals and chorus was generally very good indeed; where some extra support was needed, the orchestra provided it. Well done!

Talented Claire Carr not only directed, but choreographed, the production with invention and visual flair. The dancers were well-drilled and there were lovely stage pictures created, particularly in the opening scene where the available stage space was used to maximum effect. The "balletic" horses in the transformation scene, and the wonderful Act 2 Gavotte at the Ball, were highlights for us! Well done!

PRODUCTION

Claire's production was slick, confident and visually magical. From the opening image of the haze-engulfed slipper through to opulent wedding finale, we, and the rest of the audience, were entranced. The set pieces that we expect from any version of "Cinderella" unfolded just as we wanted them to. Acting, singing and movement were confident and looked well-rehearsed. We weren't sure that the sequence in which various citizens tried on the slipper was visible to everyone in the audience - it took place at floor level - but it was a nice touch to bring the action into the auditorium. The crucial "Transformation" scene was truly magical, and the use of a "double" to enable Cinderella to transform worked very well. The script used contained a lot of Americanisms and therefore the accents of the cast presumably had to reflect this. We did find this rather jarring at first, although the cast handled it very well, and it did not negate against our complete enjoyment of the show.

PERFORMANCES

CINDERELLA: This was Aimee Hart's debut performance with WAOS, and having seen her perform at LADS on several occasions, it was a delight to find her in the title role of Cinderella. She filled those glass slippers admirably, looking and sounding

exactly right. Aimee worked very hard to create a rounded character with spirit and humour as well as charm. She looked stunning in her ball gown; moving with grace and singing very well indeed. A lovely portrayal!

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Emma Loring really owned this role. Looking very magical, she made a real impact from her first appearance, projecting warmth and humour in her characterisation. She took the audience into the story immediately. Emma's powerful singing voice was shown to great advantage in the final "There's Music in You" number which was extremely moving! Very well done!

STEPMOTHER: This was an outstanding performance from Constance Lawton who was everyone's idea of the wicked stepmother! Glamorous but mean, vain and domineering, Constance also imbued her role with humour as she flirted with every man in sight! The "trying on the slipper" scene was very funny indeed as she tried every trick in the book to get one of her girls to the palace! Constance's considerable vocal skills were shown to advantage in her Act 2 numbers. Very well done indeed!

GRACE and JOY: Here was excellent pair-playing from Rhianna Howard and Hatty Gribben as this gruesome twosome. The two girls were clearly differentiated in terms of looks and personality, and they demonstrated a high level of comic skill both physically and vocally, with strong singing evident in their numbers! The "Lament" in Act 2 was a highlight, as was the aforementioned "trying on the slipper" scene! You couldn't help but feel some sympathy for them! Well done to both of you!

PRINCE CHRISTOPHER: Always a difficult part to play, Dannii Carr showed sincerity and strong vocals in his performance; his duets with Cinderella were a delight and they made a believable couple. Dannii needed to relax more in his body language but he avoided stereotyping his character and he brought a modern sensibility to his characterisation which was commendable!

LIONEL: In this musical, Lionel was the equivalent role to the pantomime character of Dandini, the Prince's servant and confidante. Darryl Warnaar made the most of the part as written and made a strong impression. He had stage presence and his singing and acting were very confident. Darryl's performance had humour, and his friendship with the Prince was very naturally conveyed. He also handled a lot of stage "business" with aplomb! Very well done!

QUEEN CONSTANTINA/KING MAXIMILLIAN: This regal duo played very nicely opposite each other, to create an endearing pair! They obviously loved each other, and their son; the King clearly did as he was told by his spouse but this was charmingly, and amusingly, portrayed by Tracey Hackett and Tom Whelan. Their duet was a bit of challenge but their warmth and humour was evident. An enjoyable stage partnership!

DANCERS/ENSEMBLE: The dancing in the show was outstanding and everyone moved, sang and reacted with clearly identifiable characterisations. This was particularly evident in the wonderful ball scene! We would have liked a little more hustle and bustle in the opening scene, but the sequence in which various citizens tried on the slipper was amusingly played by everyone involved. It looked as though the whole company was having great fun and this played a big part in the success of the show!

SUMMATION

I think it's obvious that we loved this production. It looked wonderful and was directed, and performed, to a very high standard. WAOS has set the bar for the rest of the season in terms of the Showcase Festival. Jenny, Dawn and I all agreed that we could happily have watched this lovely show all over again! Congratulations to everyone involved!

Best wishes

Andrew Hodgson (Adjudicator)