

## NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2014-15

Wickham Bishops Drama Club

Red Riding Hood by Norman Robbins

Directed by Sue Matten

Wickham Bishops Village Hall

8/1/15

Adjudicated by Andrew Hodgson accompanied by Liz Mullen

### INTRODUCTION

Based on the traditional fairy tale, Norman Robbins' version of "Red Riding Hood" has all the traditional pantomime ingredients: romance, magic, villainy and lots of comedy! Given that the story is slight, this version did seem rather padded out in places, but none-the-less was highly entertaining! The twist of having Grandma Merry as the original Red Riding Hood, and the Wolf coming back for revenge, was a nice touch!

### FRONT-OF-HOUSE/PUBLICITY

It is always a pleasure to visit this spacious and well-equipped venue. We received a very friendly, and efficient, welcome from the smartly attired FOH team; the excellent seats and refreshments were much appreciated. The informative programme was clearly and attractively designed. There had been some concern expressed to us about the lack of seats sold for this first-night performance, but as it turned out there seemed to be about 50 people present; nearly a full house in some of the smaller village halls we visit!

### SETTING/PROPS

This production was a visual delight and the colourful, pastoral settings were lovely to look at. The backdrops were prettily painted and designed to create a magical atmosphere. We particularly liked the riverside scene with its water-wheel, and the village green, adorned with a colourful Maypole, was perfect for this story. The practical use of swivel flats at either side of the stage was a great way of enhancing scene changes. These were conducted efficiently, if rather noisily at times. It would have been nice to have had some music to have covered these moments.

Properties were all very good, suitably larger-than-life and in-keeping with the story. (We loved the Rat Puppet!)

### LIGHTING/SOUND

The technical aspects of this production were excellent. Liz and I were very impressed with the lighting design of the show, which really enhanced the magic of the performance. This was particularly evident in the opening Woodland sequence, which later became quite chilling to look upon as the Wolf tracked Belinda on her way to Grandma's cottage! The riverside positively dappled in the sunshine, and the use of various gobos, and a follow spot, helped to enhance the visual effects. Cues were smoothly and efficiently executed. Very well done!

Sound effects were also very well done, with wittily chosen music used to underscore the comic action (the Bakery routine being a case in point!). The use of radio mics, which presumably are necessary in this venue, were not quite as successful; some “reverb” was evident at this performance.

## COSTUMES

Wickham Bishops are renowned for their costumes and on this occasion the Wardrobe team has surpassed themselves! The large cast were adorned in a positive cornucopia of colourful outfits, 18<sup>th</sup> Century in style and carefully co-ordinated. The Dame wore a different ensemble on every appearance, causing much hilarity! The Fairy looked very glamorous, and Sir Jasper had look of the “Laughing Cavalier” about him! Belinda was every inch the heroine in her impressive red-hooded cloak, and both she, and the Prince, were magnificent in their wedding outfits. Boy Blue and Bo Peep (complete with crook) could have stepped straight out of a nursery rhyme book! We were also impressed by the Wolf’s head, although a crown might have been nice touch when he declared himself the King!

Hairstyles, wigs and make-up were also good.

Very well done to everyone involved in this aspect of the production!

## MUSIC/CHOREOGRAPHY

It is always desirable to have live music if possible, and the three musicians who played at this performance, Thomas, Colin and Anne, really entered into the spirit of the show, and accompanied the singers nicely, offering good support. The choral singing was delivered with clarity and enthusiasm, whilst all the soloists really tried their best, given that some of the songs chosen were challenging! Some words went awry in “Getting to Know You”, which caused a few giggles from the participants but this just added to the fun!

Although a lot of the choreography was quite basic, everything had been geared realistically to cover the range of dancing abilities amongst the large cast. We loved the Maypole dance, and the Fairies were always a delight to watch. It was also great to see the boys in the cast having their moment to shine in the Bakery routine!

## PRODUCTION

Although we had been warned that this production had suffered from some health issues, this was not evident at the first night performance, which proceeded smoothly, if rather slowly at times. We felt that some of the songs, and comedy routines, could have been trimmed back a little to engender a little more pace, particularly in Act 2. However, Sue had created a great feeling of team spirit among her large cast, who played with sincerity and enjoyment throughout. The available stage space was used well and there were some nice groupings. This was very much a traditional pantomime, and it was happily presented as such, with the characters looking, and sounding, exactly as a good pantomime demands! We often see productions where attempts have been made to “up-date” the format and, as a result, the magic is

sometimes missing! Sue and her team are to be commended for creating that all-important magical atmosphere! The cast seemed confident with their lines, although some jokes were lost because some of the dialogue was not pointed up more forcefully. Comedy routines were well-staged; the “Word Game” and the “Rat in the Bakery” sequences proved to be particularly giggeworthy!

## PERFORMANCES

**BELINDA MERRY:** Laura Kittle was a delightful heroine. She was everything a true Principal Girl ought to be. Totally confident and committed, Laura had a lovely smile and developed a warm rapport with the audience. Laura showed good dialogue skills and a nice singing voice. She also played very ably, and sincerely, opposite her fellow actors. Very well done Laura!

**THE WOOD FAIRY:** Heather Lealan was a glamorous and traditional pantomime Fairy. The embodiment of goodness, Heather spoke her verse with clarity and expression. Her opening scene really got the show off to a strong beginning, and Heather led her young fairy attendants with aplomb! Well done!

**LUPUS REG:** Jack Williams looked splendid in his Wolf’s Head, and he projected dramatically through it to present us with a truly ravenous villain! Jack moved well and showed good variation in his speech. His characterisation also had a regal air that suited the role very well. The fear shown by the Villagers when the Wolf appeared was completely understandable! Very well done!

**BOY BLUE and BO-PEEP:** These two characters, taken straight from Nursery Rhyme, came as a duo. Their function was primarily to impart information to other characters in order to keep the plot moving. Although they couldn’t do much to individualise their characters, the ever-reliable Linda Burgess, and her stage partner Paige Rowell, looked just right and performed with diligence. However, Paige needs to ensure that she does let her voice drop too quietly.

**SIR JASPER DE VYLE:** Ian Lodge, looking the part exactly, went about his dastardly deeds with relish and panache (and also with his tongue firmly in his cheek!). Pompous, blustering and conniving, with excellent facial expressions, Iain’s vocal interpretation was also exactly right. His comic playing with Hustle and Bustle, and Grandma Merry, provided the show with some of its funniest moments. Very well done!

**HUSTLE and BUSTLE:** Zoe Duddell and Debbie Allen were an enthusiastic double-act who obviously enjoyed working together! Looking rather like a pair of Ken Dodd’s Diddy Men, this bumbling duo were at the centre of most of the show’s comic capers, and they entered into these moments with wholehearted physicality and good facial expressions. However, both ladies had a tendency to throw away the punchlines of their gags, when more emphasis was needed. This is something they need to work upon in the future.

PRINCE EDWARD: Great to see a traditional Principal Boy...in other words played by a girl! Michelle Bacon strode onto the stage with confidence and gave us a warm-hearted hero who was sincere in everything he did and said. Although we would have liked more light and shade in her vocal delivery, Michelle showed a warm sense of humour in her likeable performance.

BOBBY SHAFTOE: Sue Walker used her warm personality and expressive face to create a lovable character. She had a nice rapport with the audience, and her fellow players. Again, Sue had a tendency to swallow some of her gag lines, and we felt that her performance needed to be a tad "bigger" in its presentation. However, Sue had a good sense of comedy that was most enjoyable to watch.

GRANDMA MERRY: We absolutely loved Graham Pipe's traditional Dame that owed much to some famous Dames of yore, such as Norman Evans, Arthur Askey and Old Mother Riley. Graham stayed in his elderly persona throughout, using a northern accent and comedy posture to create a memorable character. Graham had excellent timing and a great rapport with the audience and his fellow actors. Very well done indeed!

THE GHOST/RAT PUPPETEER: Both James and Asher did exactly what was required of them and added to the fun of the production. We thought the Rat sequence was hilarious!

THE THREE CHILDREN: Hannah, Jenson and Joe were delightful in their scene, speaking clearly and singing with confidence.

ADULT CHORUS: The chorus worked very well together and clearly enjoyed themselves. A true sense of community was engendered among the Villagers. There was good singing from everyone, and good reactions to the events going on around them.

JUNIOR CHORUS: It was great to see so many enthusiastic youngsters in this production, including several lads who were given their chance to shine in the Bakery scene. The Fairy and Maypole dancers were also delightful. Well done!

## SUMMATION

This was a very colourful production of a traditional pantomime. The first night could have done with a little more pace but we thoroughly enjoyed this entertaining show. Well done to everyone involved!

Best Wishes  
Andrew Hodgson (Adjudicator)