

Wickham Bishop Drama Club

Aladdin- Limelight scripts

Director Sue Matten

Musical Director Alex Lawrence

Wickham Bishops Village Hall

10/1/2020

It is always a pleasure to visit Wickham Bishops Drama club as there is always a warm welcome and a large community spirit at every show they perform at the village hall. We were welcomed by Len Howard who looked after us so well and we would like to thank him for the refreshments at the interval.

This was my first show of the season and what a way to see the New Year in with a traditional pantomime giving us all the well-loved story characters. Aladdin has been a popular pantomime since it was dramatised in 1788 by John O'Keefe and is one of the best known pantomimes today with its colourful characters and story line

So what makes a pantomime??? Brightly painted sets and sparkling costumes, lots of singing, dancing and really bad jokes, told tongue in cheek. Then of course there should be a Dame who is a man and a principal boy who is a girl. This pantomime had all of these traditions in spades. It really was a vision to see and I have to hand it to the Wardrobe Mistress Jenny Higgins and her assistant Nicola Thomas, as the costumes were absolutely beautiful!

The sets had been made and painted by the crew and again were bright and well thought out. I did love the scene when Aladdin and Princess Yasmin were on a flying carpet with the star backcloth, really magical. Additionally the red palace scene with gold dragons at the rear was super.

Having the live musical accompaniment of Musical Director Alex Lawrence on the keyboard and Colin Turner on the drums added to the whole entertainment.. The overture of '*Diamonds are a girl's best friend*' and '*Money, Money. Money*', before the actors came on, gave us a jolly start to the proceedings.

Enter stage left, the pantomime villain, which of course is the evil Abanazer played with panache by Ross McTaggart. With an excellent costume and turban plus beard he looked every inch the evil magician and got the audience booing from the word go. I loved the green spot light that surrounded him as this made him look even more evil.

Enter stage right the Spirit of the Ring played beautifully by Michelle Bacon, a vision of red and purple who spoke in rhyme and acted the role perfectly with great charm and clarity.

We then meet the family of Widow Twanky, Wishee Washee and of course Aladdin. This unconventional family all worked at the Launderette but it seemed that no one ever wanted to do any work. Widow Twanky was very tall and slim, not your usual dame and for me I

would have liked to have seen her in some large, over the top dresses rather than the trouser suit, as the outfit did not seem to help the suspension of disbelief in the character. However James Bacon worked well as the Widow and was supported by Nick Hewes as Wishee Washee who I was told had earlier hurt his back, so accolades go to him for carrying on - as this role is an energetic one. Lots of silly jokes and puns which were great but sometimes got a little lost in the timing. Both had a good rapport with the audience, who loved their performances.

Aladdin played with boyish charm by Leigh Perry gave us a romantic principle boy lead who desperately wanted to meet the Princess and marry her. Good stance, lots of thigh slapping and a strong voice, with a confident presentation, made us believe in her from the start.

Princess Yasmin (Catherine Grace) and her handmaiden Suki (Debbie Irby) were beautifully dressed and both clear in projection. Both were super in their roles with good stage presence looking every inch the royal Princess and companion.

Emperor and Empress Ming (Charlie Willettt and Rona Shone) were very richly dressed and gave dignity to the Palace scene in their royal thrones. The fun pairing of Yin and Yang as the Chinese policemen was a stroke of genius, as they were incredibly funny. Linda Burgess and Sue Walker really stole the scene every time they came on with the pseudo Chinese accents.

The Genie of the Lamp (Paul Matten), with his bald green head, beard, moustache and a fabulous costume, really looked the part. Strong and commanding he used his powers to transport them all to Tibet. He could have stepped out from a Disney film, such was the strong vision that he portrayed.

Of course we usually have a ghost in a panto but this year it was the Abominable Sandra (Jenny Turnball) who made everyone laugh in her white furry costume pretended to be fierce but all she really wanted was a friend.

The children in the ensemble are all to be congratulated for all the dances and songs that they had to learn. I particularly loved the Chinese Ribbon dance and the Fan dance. All of them were wonderful on stage but just sometimes I wish that some of the older ones would smile a little more as they looked so serious. Their timing for all their scenes was impeccable and they obviously had been very well rehearsed.

Choreographers (Jenson Bacon and Linda Burgess) gave us flair and creativity in the dance and movement routines. I can see just how much hard work went into each of the dances and songs. Lighting (Robert Brown) was good with some great effects, especially the opening of the cave entrance and the Flying Carpet scene. Sound (Ken Matten) was on the whole good with a little feedback from the microphones which were set on the front of the stage floor.

This was a fun pantomime with all the ingredients for a successful show and I hope that Wickham Bishops go on from strength to strength in their ninety second year. Congratulations to Sue Matten the director and all of you for your hard work and commitment which truly showed last night.