



Parish Players

Beauty and the Beast

5th-8th January 2011

To be honest, once invited to write the crit for this year's Parish Players Panto, Beauty and the Beast, it was with some trepidation that I agreed. You see, Pantos have never really been my most favourite type of production, and I have never before had any experience of writing a review. Not to mention standing up in front of everyone and witnessing your reaction as I read it to you. However, after remembering last year's very successful 'The Wizard of Oz', which I thoroughly and genuinely enjoyed, I was quite looking forward to the job!!

As everyone knows Beauty and the Beast is a traditional fairy tale, one that perhaps has been made most famous by the 1991 Disney film. Bradford & Webster however, bring us the Pantomime version. As I have no previous knowledge of Bradford & Webster, I felt some research was required before attending the show.

Their script warns the performing company, and I quote "Don't be daunted by the large number of scene changes!" Now I have only been a member of PP for a short while, but I thought this would be seen more as a challenge than a hindrance.

At this point it only seems fair that I begin this crit with special praise for Neil Hellard and his army of helpers for their hard work, in the mammoth task in transporting us all to the tiny village of Petit Pois and the cafe of Monsieur & Mme Tres Joile. From the village, the spooky woods, the mountains and to the Palace where there was real depth to the set, I could see a considerable amount of hard work and dedication went into providing us with backdrops that any panto director would die for!!

The numerous amounts of scene changes were seamless and Anne Carroll as the Stage Manager deserves credit, as the action flowed from one scene to another without any major distractions.

The panto burst into life with The Rose Fairy played beautifully and with great ease by Andrea Matsell. In her Allo Allo French accent, she introduced us to the forthcoming action with style and elegance. The opening number of Dancing in the Street, was a fantastic number to begin the panto, it soon had the audience tapping their feet along to the music.

Now Richard Warner as Dame Dolly was no yummy mummy but he expertly played the part, was confident and came across as a very experienced Dame when addressing

the audience, and although a few sweets could have been flung my way, I very much enjoyed the enthusiasm within his performance.

Dame Dolly introduced us to two of his three daughters, Chardonnay and Lambrini. Two larger than life characters that were quite brilliantly played by Caroline Chick and Hannah Reeves respectively. Their comedy timing and chemistry were to be commended. I particularly enjoyed their song and dance number 'Be Good to Mama' with Dame Dolly from the Musical hit Chicago .

Anouska Mason starred as the young lead and delivered a delightful and accomplished performance as the sweet and innocent Belle. I thought she worked very well with all her fellow cast members, and seemed a very natural performer.

Playing supporting roles is never an easy thing to achieve as the majority of the time the action is being played around you and it is a challenge to remain focussed. So it was with great aplomb that Fifi, Mimi and Trixi never once strayed from their ditzy characters and at all times played their parts to the full with energy and endeavour – so Danni Matsell, Anne Murray and Katie Stayton take a bow.

In this panto a song is never too far away, and in Michael Jackson's 'The Way You Make Me Feel' Jean Claude made his entrance in another well choreographed routine. Joe Reeves's Jean Claude was a fantastic creation. Funny, very self assured and extremely oily, he had the audience in the palm of his greasy little hands, with his sly looks and cheeky winks.

David Golder was perfectly cast as Papa and produced a trustful performance managing to convey real emotion to what was a touching scene when he said farewell to Belle at the castle.

Unsung hero award must surely go to the two people who were responsible for the four legged, dancing and lovable, but cowardly panto horse Gigi. It must take years of practise to co-ordinate legs that move in the same direction at the same time and avoid falling over one another, but Margaret Chick and Chrissy Watson made this look incredibly easy. Their dance routine during Rawhide was one of the highlights for me.

Thigh slapping her way onto stage and through the spooky woods on her way home from Uni, was the principal boy Prince Louis. I have seen many a similar part played way over the top so the character becomes more irritating than entertaining, but Katie Matsell managed the right amount of fun and boyish enthusiasm so her role was charming, playful and very much a joy to watch, and more importantly for me, not at all irritating.

Accompanying the Prince through the woods was her trusty man-servant Jacques. Played by the very young and talented Jack Pallister, I was immediately impressed with his stage presence. He worked very well with Katie and shone through the dance numbers. The audience obviously loved him from the big cheer he received during the curtain call.

The chorus of boos were rightly reserved for the wicked witch of the woods, Countess Cruella. An outstanding performance by Toni Conyers, she oozed menace, class and nastiness and even squeezed in a Marlene Dietrich-like performance when singing Golden-Eye. Her mad laugh had me quaking in my boots!!

At this point I feel I have to mention at least one negative. Many a line was lost particularly in Act One, when cast members failed to let the laughter and boos subside before coming in with their next line. I've noticed from reading previous critics that this has been a problem in the past. This may be down to inexperience of some cast members, but just something to think about again in the future.

Now back to the positives and there were many to be found in the Beauty Parlour.

From Madame Botox - Rachael Barber - to Chelsea & Tiffany - Chloe Webster & Lucy Dunkin, all three were very entertaining and added fantastically to the mayhem. Although what followed will, I'm sure not be forgotten for many a year. A couple of sugar sweet assistants in the guise of Sven and Tarquin, otherwise known as Robert Lawrence and David Reeves, to the delight of the audience, they wiggled and waggled their way onto the stage. More worryingly, they both obviously enjoyed their characters a little too much!!

A special mention must also go to the little one who played the shrunken version of Dame Dolly. Their straight glum face looking out to the audience, after spending too much time in the sauna, was wonderfully performed and another highlight of mine.

The saying goes nice things come in small packages, well the children certainly proved that right. Their delightful dance routine definitely had the 'ah' factor and I'm sure made their parents very proud. Watch out for these little future stars – Lily Jarvis, Isabelle Quinn, Josie Quinn and Kitty Quinn.

Making his Parish Players debut as the Beast was Joshua Kynaston. He stomped around the stage with great affect and managed to transform nicely from the loud and bolshie beast to the gentler beast desperate for Belle to love him.

Standing guard inside the castle of the Beast, were the suit of armour and the enchanted portrait, hidden away inside were Roy Perryment and Chris Abbott respectively. With some neat special effects, Chris enabled the portrait to come brilliantly to life. I imagine that the costume Roy had to wear was not the easiest of costumes to sing in, but Roy bellowed out one of my favourite songs 'Be Our Guest' with great gusto, and the numerous amounts of illuminated UV pieces of food that danced around the stage was cleverly manufactured, and had the audience captivated and wanting more.

The Chorus all had good energy and never once did anyone seem out of place or lose focus. They seem to enjoy their roles and had fun being part of the Panto.

Although the end product was enjoyed by the audience, the introduction of 'Rawhide' seemed a little under rehearsed to me. Also, in my opinion I am unsure whether it should have been where it was in the panto, perhaps somewhere in the middle would have been better. I felt that after the spell had been broken by Belle falling in love with the Beast, and the subsequent return of the Prince, followed by a rousing

rendition of 'All You Need is Love' **would** have been a natural happy ending. Again this is just my view.

The show was very professionally lit, I really liked the dark red light on the wicked countess every time she entered, and the overall coverage was very well designed. So the lighting team of Katie Budd, Ali Holden and James Leslie deserve high praise indeed.

The band were note perfect and pitched their levels just right, never drowning out the singing, which can often be the case. They along with Liam Carroll and Pete Smith on sound combined to make this Panto a hit.

The costumes looked amazing and very much in keeping with the panto tradition of outlandish colours and outrageous outfits.

I'm not an expert when it comes to choreography but Danni Matsell & Jamie Litster gave us routines that were generally excellent and well put together.

Director Clare Quinn gave us a quality show full of flair, imagination and more importantly lots of fun. An awful lot of hard work had obviously gone into this show, and assisted by Caryl Court, I can honestly say that it was a very successful Panto and looked an enjoyable experience for their cast.

So a standing ovation to the director, cast and crew. Also to the whole team of volunteers and the committee who I'm sure all contributed to making this Panto so entertaining, in fact I would go as far to say it was a true triumph. Oh yes I would!

Jeff Graves