

Cinderella

Banbury Cross Players November 2023

Pantomimes are a tradition dating back over 500 years, and they have stood the test of time, particularly for younger members of the audience. This, BCP's sixth production of Cinderella, followed the age-old story popularised by the Brothers Grimm, but in a new version by BCP's very own Justin Clinch. The script, though true to the tale, was fresh and had some nice touches.

The cast was strong and when everyone was on stage, including the dancers, there was little room. All the cast were very good, but Martin Crook as Bouncy Buttons and Hilary Beaton as Bitchy Baroness Hardup particularly stood out. Martin's enthusiasm and energy endeared him immediately to the audience (the chocolate buttons might have helped too). Hilary was marvellously bitchy throughout, revelling in the audience's booing, and we certainly felt sorry for her hen-pecked husband Baron Hardup, played most effectively by BCP stalwart Nik Lester, as well as for Cinderella herself.

Speaking of which, Katy Roberts is no stranger to BCP audiences, and she played the eponymous heroine with just the right combination of vulnerability and determination. Steve Ramsden and Adrian McGlynn played Prince Charming and Dandini (either that way round or the other way round, depending). I half expected Steve to slap his thigh at various points in the show! I have seen Adrian in several previous BCP productions, but I think this was the first time I have seen him dancing. He also had an amazing ability to conjure a snippet of Adam and the Ants' Prince Charming, a feat which no else could manage (perhaps the Fairy Godmother could have done if she'd tried).

The Ugly Stepsisters, named after foot ailments (ironic considering the glass slipper takes a centre role in the plot), were suitably amusing, unrestrained, and (dare I say it) at times over the top - as expected, of course. Justin Clinch as Bunion could, I am sure, be heard in Spiceball Park, and certainly did not hold back his nastiness towards both Cinderella and Verucca, convincingly played by Simon Hook, aided admirably by a false lower leg. I suspect that Justin and Simon's wardrobe and wigs took up as much room as the rest of the cast's put together. Speaking of clothes, the costumes for the complete production were excellent, as was the pumpkin coach and dancing horses. Both of Sharon Green's dance troupes, the younger and the older, acquitted themselves very well, portraying mice, horses and those at the Prince's Ball. I was a little

surprised, though, that what I thought was going to be the curtain call ended up being another few minutes of dancing. Understandable but a shame that the younger dancers were not able to take a bow too.

There were some lovely cameos, such as that from Terry Andrews as the ancient, asthmatic palace announcer, getting more and more fraught, and being ably aided by Zac Lacey-Rousou, whose production of calling cards become more and more outrageous. Lizzie Forward haunted the woods beautifully, but I really wanted to go on stage, grab the cast in denial of ghostly happenings and turn them round! Oh well, it's all behind them now [sorry].

And you can't have a Panto without a comedy duo, can you? BCP stalwarts Jeremy Turner and Dave Smith played the light-fingered yet oafishly clumsy comedy duo. Jeremy played the (slightly!) brainier Snatchit, mercilessly winding up Dave's Grab ("Sticks!"). Helen Williams was perfect as the Fairy Godmother (and Strange Old Lady) - after all, she did say she had waited years to play the part!

This leads me on to what I thought was one of the best things about the script - the occasional 'metahumour', clearly aimed at the adults. For instance, Dave Smith is an old hand at playing Fagin in *Oliver*, and his breaking into *I'd Do Anything* was very funny for anyone in the know. There was a lovely line from someone (Prince Charming perhaps?) when things were all going wrong: "I didn't write the script" - but as it was delivered to Bunion, whose alter-ego Justin of course did, this was wonderfully ironic.

Finally, *The Twelve Alternative Days of Christmas* was great fun. Though not really an audience singalong (and actually they don't always work), it involved most of the cast, some very silly props (some of which ended up in the audience - nice ad-lib from Justin addressing Lucy Byford, the stage manager "health and safety!"), and poor old Grab getting more and more annoyed by his disappearing toilet rolls - shades of lockdown perhaps?

The show was perhaps a little too long (must have been very tiring doing two performances on the Saturday), but Liz Riley's production of Justin Clinch's *Cinderella* was very successful, and I was glad to see that at least the matinee was sold out, and rightly so. Oh yes it was!

Jo Genesis