

Cinderella by Justin Clinch

Banbury Cross Players

Reviewed by The *Oxfordshire Drama Network (ODN)*

This was my first visit to the fabulous Mill Theatre in Banbury and what a wonderful space it is. The front of house team were really a sight to behold – everywhere I looked there were team members waving programmes and directing audience members in all directions to where ever they wanted to go be it their seats, the bar, the loos or the sweetie booth. It was like a military operation with a smile and everyone felt welcomed and at ease which contributed to the buzzy atmosphere in the foyer.

The stage area was considerably larger than the village hall space we'd seen the night before, with raked seating so the audience is looking down at the action. The company made the decision not to clutter the stage with a lot of scenery instead opting for a simple projection on the back wall to suggest the setting and four tall flats – 2 either side of the projection and 2 either side of the front of the stage – painted as brick walls. I think this was a great decision as this meant there were no long scene changes and the director, Liz Riley, kept the action flowing throughout and made great use of the space with the actors bringing on furniture and props for the scene when required. The backdrops I thought were really effective particularly the ticking clock in the ball scene – it really gave a sense of passing time, very clever idea, and the fireworks at the end added to the celebratory feel. The only thing that sort of disappointed was the transformation scene where the pumpkin turned into the coach – it all happened off stage, so there was not magical wow moment that I was hoping for.

This was an original version of Cinderella, written by cast member Justin Cinch, and I have to say I thought it was a really good script with plenty of scope for silliness and audience participation. There were some cracking lines and wonderful routines which both the cast and the audience enjoyed. I did think it was a little long though – particularly the first half. It didn't finish til 10.25pm which was fine for us oldies but some of the younger members were getting a bit fidgety, it didn't help that it was also quite hot in the auditorium

and programmes were being wafted with vigour. I think there was scope to trim a few of the scenes down and this would have definitely helped sharpen the production.

The chorus gave us a lovely enthusiastic opening number and maintained that enthusiasm whenever they were onstage. I always think that a good chorus can really make a show as it amplifies the action on the stage which gives the show more impact or the wow factor – and I thought that they a great job. It was nice to see that they also involved the local dance academy (The Sharon Green Dance Academy) who were lovely and my fellow judge (who is a choreographer herself) was really impressed by the routines and the execution of the numbers – particularly when the younger ones playing mice were transformed into the older ones playing the horses.

There some well-chosen musical numbers throughout wonderfully supported by Musical Director, David Ball, on his keyboard. I particularly enjoyed the Bailiffs ‘Busy Doing Nothing’ number and the ugly sisters rediton of “Sisters” which I thought was well executed and very entertaining.

The costumes were colourful and excellent throughout – absolutely loved the ugly sisters hats in the ballroom scene decorated with champagne bottles and glasses, lovely touch. If I’m being picky, I would have liked Cinderella to have had a prettier coloured ball gown – although a lovely dress with some sparkles, it was grey and looked a little less colourful than some of the other costumes.

There were some lovely performances throughout the show – in fact I don’t think there was a weak link anywhere. There were some great double acts – the ugly sisters – Verruca and Bunion, played by Simon Hook and writer Justin Cinch, worked so well together both outrageous with great comic timing and nailed all the routines – I particularly enjoyed their adlibs with the audience, which were hysterical. Snatchit and Grab, the bailiffs, played by Jeremy Turner and David Smith were suitably daft as the terrified objects of desire of the Ugly sisters. The Baron Hardup played by Nik Lester had a great deadpan face and his comic timing was impeccable

particularly in his scenes with the Baroness played by Hilary Beaton, who was gorgeously evil, very sultry and had a great voice. Prince Charming was definitely charming, confident and dapper (played by Steve Ramsden) and I really enjoyed Adrian McGlynn's performance as Dandini who gave the role real depth and gravitas. Katy Roberts was very sweet and well cast in the role of Cinderella and Martin Crook as Buttons her lovesick would be suitor, was extremely likeable and had a great rapport with the audience. Helen Williams was lovely as the fairy godmother with perfect diction and beautiful tone to her voice. Terry Andrews played a nice cameo role as the doddering Palace Announcer – it was a nice character, and I enjoyed the joke with him struggling to get up on the box every time he made an announcement but I thought it wore a bit thin after a while and slowed the scene up a tad.

Aside from the length of the production, I thought it was a very enjoyable show with plenty of colour, stand out moments and well executed slapstick sequences throughout for the audience to engage with. Well done Banbury Cross Players!