

DAILY BLATT

EXCLUSIVE: ROYAL BALL REPORT FROM SHAWFORD



At this time of year, there is nothing like a traditional performance of Cinderella and this was nothing like a traditional performance of Cinderella!

Having 'done' (for?) Jack and the Beanstalk, Dick Whittington and Snow White, Cinderella has been given the skilful Simon Theobalds' treatment. In his characteristically witty and topical 21st century version of the familiar story, Baron Hardup's mansion is replaced by the seedy offices of the Daily Blatt, presided over by editor Phil Space, ever eager to exploit his 'old boy' connections, and his superior assistant, Polly Filler. This duo, desperate to publish a juicy 'royal' story, were played with style and assurance by two pantomime stalwarts, Ian Streat, this year spared the indignity of donning mop cap and skirts, and Jenny Walmsley, who also made a most effective audience 'stirrer-upper'.

Our heroine, in this cynical environment, was a diffident cub reporter, beautifully played by Ele Corcoran, in her first Shawford pantomime role. She sang delightfully and looked appropriately sweet and demure. The last words you would use to describe her two brassy, blowsy colleagues (aka the ugly sisters) Bryan Green and Steve Hunter, also a debutante - I use the word loosely. Their colourful costumes and bravura performances gave the production an injection of the broad (in all senses of the word) humour you associate with pantomimes.



Also hot on the scent of any whiff of scandal 'up at the palace' were a trio of unlikely gossip columnists (Sheila Forbes, Eileen Gorrod and Liz Laird). They looked mega-sophisticated, delivered their songs with style (Shawford's answer to

‘Girls Aloud’), were a convincing backing group and seemed more likely to engender gossip than report it.



At the image-conscious palace, Jon Hawkins effortlessly assumed the mantle of HRH, skilfully deploying a repertoire of all the appropriate grimaces and gestures and Ken Staunton, another experienced hand, gave a confident performance as his would-be media mogul, camera-toting brother.



Despite coping with considerable discomfort, Simon North made a convincing crotchety Duke intermittently determined to assert his bad tempered authority. He certainly gave the Pages a nasty turn (boom, boom!).

Our author, Simon Theobalds, was in splendid form and excellent voice as Sir Alan FitzTightly, the palace majordomo and fixer, a major role he had to take over at a late stage in the production. Also late in the day, Anthony Fanshawe rolled smoothly, or should it be raced, in to the part of Brigadier Ball Bearing, bringing an appropriately militaristic swagger to his role as the palace security expert and as he



disputed with the Duke for control of the pages (Ella Salkeld, Amba & Meggie Hunter, Helena, Natalie & Isabel Francis, Annie and Sara Green & Emily Gaul).

Lady Brackenlea (Jane Hazlitt) and the Countess of Malms (Muriel Forbes) again kindly consented to grace the occasion with their presence. Elegant as always, this year they seemed more concerned with musing on



past conquests – real and imaginary – rather than giving their acerbic opinions about the action on stage.

These pantomimes are very much ‘home grown’, which gives them their splendid originality and freshness. In this respect, special mention must be made of the major contribution of Martin Harris. Not only did he lead the band (Jemima Theobalds, Marcus Whitfield and Ed Gorrod), which worked incredibly hard and was very much the ‘engine room’ of the production, but he also



composed and arranged the music and wrote all the lyrics. You did not realise we had a budding Cole Porter in our midst! Ed Gorrod, having given rock-solid percussive backing to the band throughout the evening, made a late entry on stage to provide romantic interest as Prince Willing, and to deliver my favourite line of the night; “Please accept this (brandishing the appropriate instrument) as a cymbal of my affection.” !!



In the best tradition of the Shawford pantomimes, Toni Bergstrom, as prompter spoke her lines – indeed everybody’s lines – with great clarity and authority.

All these disparate strands were skilfully and imaginatively brought together into a satisfying and coherent whole by director, Sarah Hawkins. She had to cope with a range of pre-production problems, yet still had the energy to deliver a professional and assured cameo as Mystic Meg. I now know why the Hawkins’ garden – organic of course – flourishes so well. One of them is using her psychic powers and the other is whispering ‘sweet nothings’ to the flowers!





As always what happened on stage was built on the unstinting hard work of the back stage teams; the Creative Crew of John & Liz Boundy, Kevin Hughes, Adrian

Walmsley, and Jayne Hunter; and Stage Manager Duncan Potts and his team of Mark Hegan and Simon Forbes. Booking arrangements and finances were in the secure hands of Jo Pitt and Peter Moll. Management of 'front of house' was in the capable hands of Pam Theobalds, Jenny Streat and Suzie Hill.

Traditional or not this pantomime was great fun, and again we are grateful to so many of our friends and neighbours for so generously giving of their time and more importantly their skills to add to our enjoyment of the festive season.



BOB EMMERSON

