

## SLEEPING BEAUTY the Shawford Pantomime

Those of you who regard current planning procedures as a 'complete pantomime' would have had this view confirmed by this year's biennial Shawford seasonal production - "Sleeping Beauty". This pantomime is indeed a melange of bodged and fiddled planning issues and their outcomes; not you may think a promising basis for a festive entertainment. But you reckon without the wit and fertile mind of Simon Theobalds, who once again wrote the script; Martin Harris's original music and lively, topical lyrics, and the inventive and experienced direction of Eileen Gorrod, who together with the large and enthusiastic cast, which featured a number of newcomers, again 'delivered the goods' and gave us a delightful and hugely enjoyable evening.



In a story line largely concerned with change, it was good to see that this did not apply to the staff of The Bridge (not **this** Bridge, anyway!).

A wise move; the

relaxed, cheerful confidence and splendid ensemble playing of the trio of Sarah Hawkins (Landlady), Jenny Walmsley (Cookie) and Marcus Whitfield (Aleman) provided an experienced and secure hub at the heart of the production. In addition, Marcus led one of the major, tuneful numbers and the obligatory 'audience participation' song with great style and panache. The audience joined in enthusiastically and with feeling in the chorus of their song - 'Dig up the Otterbourne Road' - no doubt in an effort to expunge the remembered frustrations of road-work induced delays.



Felicity Pennycook and James Marshall seem to make a speciality of the villainous roles.

As the Evil Fairy, Fungaria, Felicity clearly enjoyed pulling out all the 'nasty' stops, and splendidly made-up, she and her heavy, 'hardmen' imps (Annie Green and Meggie Hunter) made a sinister trio, who had no difficulty in attracting the audience's boos. James skillfully brought out all the deviousness of the

wheeling and dealing, corrupt politician, Mack O' Velli (I can't think from where Simon got that name!).



Fungaria's adversary, the Good Fairy, Gloriana, was played by Sheila Forbes, not as the traditional saccharinic, goody-goody, but much more originally, as a comic, over-anxious, slightly distraught lady, who was as much concerned that her dress was not 'whiter than white' as she was in thwarting Fungaria's wicked plans. But she got there in the end.

This year Bryan Green, for once playing a 'goodie' (well I suppose it depends on your view of 'golfspeak'!) teamed up with Steven Hunter, on something of a 'busman's holiday', to play a couple of golfing fanatics. Clad in golfing attire, which would surely have had them 'blackballed' from St. Andrew's, they gave relaxed, assured performances and



ranged the whole gamut of golf talk from Tee to Green.

Appropriately attired in a check jacket reminiscent of a chess board, Anthony Fanshawe gave a bravura performance as an archetypal estate agent, delivering his jokes (Some which we had seen before and others we have not seen yet!) with obvious relish and enjoyment.



This pantomime was a major commitment as far as the Wells family were concerned. Nick and Pippa, experienced pantomime hands, were the happy couple at the conclusion of 'Puss in Boots', and are now married and have somehow

acquired royal status, albeit of a somewhat proletarian nature. Georgina was in excellent voice and

delivered her 'narration' songs with style. The total involvement of the family was completed by Emma, who was the hardworking keyboard player of the music group.



The fictitious offspring of the royal couple, who becomes the eponymous heroine of the pantomime, was played by Olivia Warner, who sang well and convincingly conveyed her frustrations as a thwarted, bonus-earning, 'Sloane Ranger'. A role model effectively represented by her 'ok-yah! friend, Annabel (Abbi Warner). Cessie, Sleeping Beauty, was awakened from her comatose state in the traditional manner by a grand looking Prince Charming played by Elly Chapman.

The Count of Malms (Jon Hawkins reprising the role) and Lord Brackenlea (somewhat metamorphosed in the



shape of newcomer John Amos) graced the occasion with their presence, and in between bemoaning their states of health and financial well being, delivered their lofty and crusty observations on proceedings. I suppose they are a sort of Greek chorus. They did not look very Greek to me - you could almost smell the single malt and cigars.

A large number of younger members of the community were involved in the production this year, in the roles of fairies of various types (Mary Amos, Antonia Ashton-Key, Natalie Francis, Emily Gaul, Lucy Green, Emily Marshall, Ellie Hanson, Izzie Hanson, Georgie Howells, Pippa Rees, Emma Vallis and Izzy Francis.) Sadly not a male amongst them, but I suppose it is particularly difficult to persuade boys to take on the roles of fairies, even if they are fairies of 'special scientific interest'! The girls looked charming, joined enthusiastically in all the songs, and those with lines to deliver, did so with clarity and confidence.

The music group of Musical Director, Martin Harris (guitar). Terry Hopkins (guitar), Emma Wells (keyboard) and Gordon Munro (drums),

was the veritable engine room of the production. They worked hard throughout the evening, setting the scene with an excellent overture, giving secure and lively backing to all the musical numbers and providing appropriate incidental music and even the occasional sound effects when required.

Much credit must also be given to the backstage crew and the support team; to Kevin Hughes for managing the lighting and for the special effects he was able to produce; to Rachel Hunt and Coleen Dowling for creating the witty set; to Toni Bergstrom, the most experienced Shawford pantomime hand of them all, who as prompter effectively plugged any gaps (remarkable few at the performance I attended); to Andrea Green and Jane Hunter who relieved us of our money in a painless and charming manner and to Tricia Caffyn and her team for providing the essential refreshments.

For those of us who are ancient residents of the community, apart from the jollity of the evening, it was interesting and somewhat salutary to be reminded of all the changes that have taken place over the past thirty years; of the changes in road patterns; the threat of road closures; the houses which have disappeared, the proliferation of parked cars, etc. etc. But let's not get maudlin and detract from the fact that our friends and neighbours, by their hard work and enthusiasm, provided us with a very happy and jolly two hours, which made us forget the cold outside and effectively drowned the mournful sound of crunching credit.

Bob Emmerson

