

Parish Players' Mother Goose January 2009

I watched this year's panto on the opening night and the final night, and as usual, Parish Players did not fail to provide an entertaining evening, and my friends who had never seen a PP production were very impressed with the entire show.

I am not an expert on set design but I was impressed with all the sets in this production. I loved the attention to detail such as the underwear on the washing line and the satellite dish which proceeded to dance along with the chorus! I also appreciated the sign for 'Little Hassle' and 'Small Inconvenience', and the fairy lights in the final scene were a great touch. The props seemed very well designed and made, in particular the over-sized tea bags. The demon's trident and King Gander's sceptre were also appreciated, but perhaps the golden eggs could have been a little bigger to be seen better from the back.

I was very impressed with the lighting, in particular the differences between the fairy spotlight and the red for the demon. The sound effects were also good, but it was unfortunate that some were missed out on Wednesday, such as the Mastermind theme. Although the technical crew were clearly enjoying the show on Saturday night, it was a shame that the audience became aware of their presence.

The costumes, as usual, were fabulous, especially Priscilla the goose. I don't know how many hours went into making this costume but I was so impressed with the blinking eyes and quacking mouth in particular. I liked the chorus' costumes for the goose dance and 'One Singular Sensation', with the different black outfits united by the silver throughout. The dame's costumes were also very good; particularly the seemingly-endless layers she wore for the strip-tease. There was a slight confusion over the dame's wigs, however, as she was blonde when she was made 'beautiful', but back to being brunette in the second half. This was quite confusing and there seemed little difference between the 'ugly' and the 'pretty' Mother Goose, although panto magic did allow a little for this!

The band, directed by Charlie Hamblin, was very tight and seemed well-rehearsed, although perhaps they did not have enough rehearsals with the cast; several times there was quite a pause between a line and a song beginning whilst the cast doing their best to ad lib. This improved by Saturday, but it was a shame it wasn't as tight on Wednesday. Perhaps more rehearsal for 'That's the end of the show' was required, as the chord sequences were plainly wrong, although I did note an improvement in Saturday's performance. The song choices throughout were appropriate, as was the incidental music, although more music during scene changes would have made for less awkward silences. However, I thought the band was far too loud during most of the songs, a view shared by a number of people who spoke to me. The chorus and principals alike struggled to be heard above them, even when miked. Perhaps the chorus could have projected slightly more, but it is appreciated this is particularly hard in higher registers. It was noted that the miked principals could be heard better from the back of the hall than the front. It was a good volume for the incidental music, but it must be remembered that the band is backing the singers during songs, not the other way around. I'm not entirely convinced a band of 6 was necessary for such a small hall, but the little extras such as the saxophone in the strip tease did add a great touch. It was a much better set up to have the band across the front of the hall rather than in a corner as it gave a much more even sound.

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The choreography by Jamie Litster was very good, particularly in the goose dance and 'One Singular Sensation'. All the cast did very well with the dancing, although more smiles would have been appreciated, particularly from the chorus in the opening number. Even though all the lyrics were audible in this number, it lacked the oomph and jazz an opener should have. This picked up during 'Everything's coming up roses' when some of the chorus were clearly having fun, but this was needed throughout the show. I also felt the chorus were very static in a couple of the dances, perhaps they could have been given directions to bob on the spot or sway? The ghouls in 'Bad to the bone' were fabulous, particularly those who went over the top. The chorus was generally very strong, and I liked the mixed age range. As a whole, they needed to smile and relax more, but I was very impressed with their reactions to the principals' lines.

The car scene was fantastic; driving through Merton Park was a touch of genius from Chris Abbott, and had the audience laughing right to the end. The mirror scene with the dame and the demon was also very enjoyable, although when I sat towards the left of the audience, I did not have a very good view of the people in the mirror. It also looked like it had been forgotten and pushed on at the last minute as it was so squashed in the corner. Perhaps more people could have enjoyed the joke if it had been in the middle of the stage and actors could have put their heads through the tabs when 'in' the mirror.

David Golder played the title role of Mother Goose very well, and managed to make the dame both likeable when she was being good and unlikeable when she sold Priscilla, which is something a dame rarely has to do. She had a very good stage presence, and I particularly like the way she and Priscilla greeted each other every time. Squire Goodheart, played by Richard Warner had some fantastic facial expressions, and sang his song, 'Somebody to love' extremely well. His entrances were always full of energy and he had very good comic timing. Chrissie Watson as Priscilla managed to give what was essentially a big ball of fluff character and personality, and was loved from the moment she walked, or waddled, on. She was very engaging and almost made the audience understand her quacking! It must have been a very hot and heavy costume, and I'm told it wasn't taken off until the very end of the show so hats off to Chrissie. I particularly loved the laying of the golden eggs and how well she reacted to everything happening on stage.

Kitty Quinn was a gorgeous 'littlee', and sang her song beautifully with Mother Goose. Fairy Goosedown and the Demon of Discontent were played respectively by Caryl Court and Emily Miller with lots of enthusiasm, and I particularly enjoyed the kiwi jokes added by Emily throughout the show. Anne Murray as Jill Goodheart made the most of a part with very little character and Joe Reeves gave King Gander a fine regal quality.

Without a doubt, Richard Flanagan, playing Billy Goose, was the star of the show. From the moment he walked on stage he was very engaging and full of energy, and this did not wane as the show went on. His facial expression during the scene where Fairy Goosedown was visible to him was priceless, and kept the audience giggling for the entire scene. His song with Jill was also very good, and the romance between these two was quite believable. The principals on the whole needed to wait for the audience's

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reaction to die down before saying their next line, as many were lost while the boos and cheers were still going on, although this had improved by Saturday.

Overall I felt this production was very well-directed and I would like to congratulate every single person involved for such an enjoyable evening.

Hannah Reeves