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Society : Cygnet Players
Production : A Midsummer Night's Dream
Date : 18th May 2016
Venue : St Barnabas Church Southfields
Report by : Tony Sweeney

Show Report

General

This was Cygnets' first attempt at Shakespeare and on the 400th anniversary of his death it is clear the magic of his writing still holds you spellbound. Performed in an adapted church, this was a fair effort especially for the first attempt, from all involved to bring probably his most popular play to life.

The pre-show announcement to switch off mobile phones, a must these days, was done well with the character of Philostrate delivering it in a Shakespearian style which made it part of the play.

The setting for this was more contemporary than is usual, adding to the timelessness quality of his work and reinforcing its value.

Players

Jamie Miller (Puck) was fantastic in the role in an iconic costume reminiscent of Mad Max that made her instantly recognisable. A good strong and flexible speaking voice that she projected well helped give the character presence and credibility. She also had some nice vocal and visual touches that added a wider character perspective to the role.

Mark Smith (Oberon) again delivered an imposing character with a strong regal bearing and a booming voice that gave the character real definition. This was an excellent performance in a key role. I was not sure if the wings were necessary.

Kathryn Felton (Titania) as the Queen of the fairies had a costume that separated her from the other fairies. The essence of the character is that she is flirtatious and perhaps Kathryn could have developed this aspect a little further especially as this is the stimulus for Oberon's rage and vengeful plotting at the heart of the plot.

Sam Cunningham (Lysander) as the lover of Hermia, whose infatuation sets off the whole saga, was excellent in the role moving from obsessive to jealous lover with ease and being convincing in both. This was a fantastic performance.

Russell Hughes (Demetrius) as the other male in the two couple scenario was again good in the role using his height to emphasis his characters strong nature. Again this was an excellent performance and his interactions with the other three lovers allowed all to shine.

Gemma Miles (Hermia) as the rather upright and prim Hermia did a good job in delivering this role allowing the other lovers to work off her well.

Becky Sweeney (Helena) as the self effacing Helena certainly put a lot of energy into the part which allowed the contrast with Hermia to work well.

Will Prescott (Egeus) delivered his lines solidly. The part really did not give him much opportunity to explore a character.

Nick Dore (Theseus) as the Duke played it with a slightly whimsical feel which I thought helped define the role as a benevolent ruler. Clearly relaxed in the role, this was a solid performance.

Florence Akano (Hippolyta) as the Queen of Athens played the role down giving a contrast to the Duke.

Jon Bradley (Nick Bottom) as Bottom complete with Northern accent worked hard to deliver the comedic essence of the role. I did think at times he tried a little too hard which although enhancing the comical elements was at times a little over the top. Of course when playing Pyramus, this was ideal.

Aimee Parnell (Peter Quince/Moth) was excellent as Peter Quince projecting the bossy almost controlling essence of the character with a strong stage presence that dominated the first meeting of the mechanicals.

Sally Reeve (Francis Flute/Cobweb) showed a range of acting styles in a number of situations. Firstly as the rather laddish Francis Flute then as one of the fairies and lastly as Thisbe which she shone in.

Bethany Wilkinson (Robin Starvelling/Foxglove), Alice Massey (Tom Snout/ Peaseblossom) and Harriet Pauly (Snug/Mustardseed) as both the mechanicals and the attendant fairies all gave solid performances especially so since these parts tend to be rather peripheral to the main characters. All were confident and comfortable on stage which allowed them to give good performances.

Alison Walters (Philostrate) who by doing the pre-show announcements signalled the beginning of the action had good bearing which projected the role.

Director

Phoebe Fleetham had a clear vision of what she wanted from the cast and some nice touches such as having the mechanicals dressed as England football supporters showed a willingness to try different things.

Stage Management

A simple curtain surround allowed entrances and exits to work from a number of points and this worked well in allowing the play to flow well. Moving a garden bench on wheels and having to secure it did not always go smoothly but the cast got round this well.

Sound

The sound was a little mixed with some performers better able to project their voices than others. I would have expected the acoustics of a church to have helped this but this was not always the case.

Lighting

Given that this was a church without fixed lights, the lighting worked well with some nice touches in coordination with the action on stage. The fairies apparently turning lights on and off to reinforce their magical powers was done well.

Make-up

The make up was done well with that for Puck being especially effective. Overall the make up helped define the characters being portrayed well. Having the mechanicals double up as the fairies enabled the make-up to work for both.

Set Design

The set revolved around a garden theme ideal for the play. Garden furniture and two raised areas allowed a degree of flexibility throughout. Having fake Ivy climb the pillars of the church was a nice touch. Of course this play is one popularly performed outdoors and the set tends not to be a key feature, the set by reflecting an outdoor theme followed that trend.

Props

The props were all used well; the sword used in the mechanicals play looked like the sort you would expect to see in the circumstances.

Costumes

The costumes were interesting, with the mechanicals in football shirts before changing into fairy garb. The fairy wings were a bit mixed with one set clearly not fixed properly as it drooped. The costume for Bottom as Pyramus was excellent completely reinforcing the character in the play within a play.

Programme

The programme gave all the information you would expect. The director's reflections showed how much she enjoyed the show and this came across though the performance.

Front of house

The front of house reception was excellent welcoming and friendly and dealing with everyone well.

Tony Sweeney
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