

North Essex Theatre Guild
SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2025/2026

ADJUDICATION

Group	BRANTHAM AMATEUR THEATRICAL SOCIETY (BATS)
Venue	BRANTHAM VILLAGE HALL
Date of Adjudication	20th FEBRUARY 2026
Production	BEAUTY AND THE BEAST by Tom Whalley
Director	Pippa Revell
Adjudicated by	Dawn King
Assisted by	Mike Sullivan

FRONT OF HOUSE

An efficient front of house welcome, although parking this time seemed more difficult than usual despite being early! The raffle was well managed and efficient, and there was a great mug of tea from the refreshment team. The lavishly produced programme set the scene for the panto, and it was nice to see the level of support from advertisers. Of particular note was the quality and natural poses of the headshots, the colour choice and the choice of a typeface, which was both informal yet clear. We read the director's note with interest and empathy, and hope that changes do not mean that the good work done by this group is threatened in the future.

LIGHTING AND SOUND

Lighting – Good use was made of the available rig with coverage of the stage and appropriate mood setting which reflected the transfer between physical changes and mood change very well. I liked the use of brightened green for Sacre Bleu on her entrance that then faded slightly as the scene progressed. Sometimes 'less is more' and my colleague found the rotating GOBO projectors somewhat annoying and in the "I put a spell on you" number they were distracting. The follow spots were put to good use with the operators accurately and smoothly tracking the actors.

Sitting near the aisle my companion and I found the use of 2 profile lanterns to illuminate the centre aisle could have been reduced in intensity - or better shuttered down - as they acted as blinders creating visual disturbance on occasions

Sound – The sound effects were appropriate and delivered in a timely manner. We noted that occasionally the balance between the miked actors and the recorded music overwhelmed the singing.

SET, STAGING AND STAGE MANAGEMENT

Set – Given their need for a complete change from the pattern of rehearsal/build for previous productions we thought the concept of story book as backcloth was a triumph. The book was well designed and executed. It was an appropriate size and beautifully painted and we especially liked the subtle use of sparkles. I liked the way that the black side tab had been broken up with the use of an appropriately sized picture representing the town, and the roses that gave a good visual impact and supported the narrative. Great work by all concerned.

We also liked the second act double doors set – simple but well presented.

The reveal of Beast/Prince by Gaviscon's admirers was really very well executed and well-rehearsed and was very effective.

However, we did find the long set change times interrupted the flow of the action and overall pace, particularly in Act 2. Although the set dressers coming round the side of the front tabs were efficient, they were disruptive, and we felt that there could have been more visible use of cast to move things on and off without the rather slow tab open/close. We also felt that the use of a large table on several occasions acted as a barrier between actors and audience and made the action unnecessarily static in those scenes.

PROPS

Pantomimes rely on visual effects, and this one was no exception! Actors handled their props well, the use of the water gun was managed well, there was a nice display of food for the buffet.

Cake making scene- this section was generally pacy and well executed by everyone involved. The use of the paddling pool for the slapstick sequence was inventive solution to the health and safety concerns that come with wet floor scenes, and the cast members introduction added a humorous touch.

Baking trolley sequence– The playwright uses the device of listing items with double meaning in a number of his scripts, and it needs to be delivered at pace in order to achieve the maximum effect. Perhaps a better organization of the trolley and a helper to take off the finished items would have made it slicker

COSTUME, HAIR AND MAKE-UP

Costume – this was generally well thought through, and reflected the current visual image that is associated with the fairy tale. Many of the costumes were beautifully made or adapted, and our heroine looked stunning in both her main outfit and the ball dress, whilst the Professor's patched costume indicated an absent-minded, poor inventor.

The Beast costume was really good, especially the hands which allowed for very natural manipulation, and the head-dress was excellent.

There was lots of innovation too in terms of the "objects" and a cross over between costume and props that gave great flexibility – such as the outfits for the candelabras, and the trees, and came into their own as the actors wearing them used them to full effect. This is also true of the costume of Sacre Bleu and her wolves, where the costume really enhanced the character

within the panto, and suited the bearing and movement of the evil group. The toilet and teabag outfits for Brie and the Dame were inspired!

The colour palette for the ensemble costumes was not clear, but the outfits were attractive and worn well. I also made a note that the footwear was consistent, and changed on occasion to match the outfit – a detail too often missed, and particularly notable with a raise stage. Overall, this was really good work by the costume team – well done!

In terms of make-up, this was generally good. We thought that the design of the wolves make up was good – particularly round the hairline, but it needs to be a bit stronger to have impact from the stage. I was not a fan of the use of facial glitter in early scenes – it would have been great for the walk down to signify the celebration – but what was worn was well applied.

MUSIC

There was a good mix of panto standards and new ideas to support story line, and it was helpful to have them listed in the programme!

I thought the performance levels were good with everyone on key. Frankie's solo was outstanding, well delivered with natural movements and good support from the wolves, and "I'm too sexy" was almost a showstopper – well delivered with great support from his groupies! Belle has a lovely tuneful voice and demonstrated good "acting through song" techniques,

All ensemble numbers were well rehearsed, and a jolly good sound created! Well done Jaquie.

I did note that the choice of Act 1 finale 'Roll with it' was not the usual 'up-beat' number, and although well delivered, did not leave the audience humming in the auditorium during the interval. The community singing spot at the end with Brie and Dame was well managed by the actors and had well timed support from the sound desk and didn't drag on for too long.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Again, performance levels across the production were good, and the choreography was imaginative. Frankie had used her performing experience to good effect, and movement had been well adapted within small groups to enable everyone to perform to their best ability. The enjoyment and confidence of the whole cast in the movement came across. Notable moments were the appearances of the wolves/Sacre Bleu in Running with the Wolves. Not only was the song well delivered but the movement of the 4 wolves was realistic and sustained throughout. Similarly, the duet dance with Belle/Beast, conveyed the deepening of their relationship well.

PERFORMANCE

Prince Claude – Ben Wilkinson

We had a nice visual introduction to the story-telling of Eclairy Fairy with Ben Wilkinson taking centre stage and responding well to the attention of the ladies, showing his disdain and arrogance. The constant plucking at his hands and shirt sleeves was a nice touch when echoed by the Beast.

The Beast – Roger Weeley

Roger was able to convincingly show the changing attitude of the Beast from terrifying roars to tender moments as the influence of Belle took effect. This was a genuine and consistent performance.

The Eclair Fairy – Lisa Butler

Dressed in a vibrant pink, Lisa brought a delightfully gentle ditziness to Eclair Fairy role. Her well-maintained French accent helped establish the setting from the outset, and she handled the complex rhyming with ease. Going forward, practising lines at a quicker pace may help reduce the small pauses created by taking a breath at the start of each line.

Sacre Bleu - Frankie Swan

The visual and physical presentation of this character was striking with great facial expression and showed real attention to detail. Strong vocally and with excellent movement, this was a polished performance. Well done Frankie.

Belle – Lilia Adams

Lilia absolutely lit up the stage in the musical/movement numbers, and worked well with other cast members, showing good spatial awareness and empathy/anticipatory skills. As a young performer you might want to consider how you transfer some of those skills into delivery of dialogue and stronger facial expression in the context of pantomime. A well judged and sympathetically portrayed performance.

Professor Phillipe – David Chilton

David's experience and beautifully resonant singing voice stood him in good stead for this lovely part, and his contribution to Somewhere Out There made this number memorable. The hair might have been a little untidier to reflect character, but otherwise a strong performance.

Gaviscon – Paul Morgan

I very much enjoyed this Elvis style portrayal. The programme notes said he was "out of his comfort zone" – but that was in no way evident during the performance, which was full of swagger and pizzazz and a level of arrogance that made him totally unlikeable! Well done.

Louis – Izzy Spiers

Despite this not being a major role, Izzy's stage presence stood out. She demonstrated active listening, excellent timing and a sense of comedy which enabled her to bring the role of Louis very much to life. A remarkable performance with little material to work from.

Brie Baguette – Mark Hinson

Mark's portrayal of Brie was almost as bright as his costume! Energetic around the stage whilst never looking to upstage or outdo the dame, Brie was a really likeable character, and Mark had good audience rapport (oui, oui!). I thought that his appearance as a toilet was amazingly funny. Well done.

Dame Bonnie Baguette – James Wetherall

It was hard to believe that this was a first “dame” experience for James. He has the whole package and was a joy to watch. Comedy lines landed well, and the costume and wigs seemed very comfortable. James didn’t wander off into too much extended ‘dame’ repartee with the audience, so the humour of those moments was maintained. Very well done!

Salé – Stephanie Mayhew/ Poivre – Alan Jones

I’ve linked these two actors together because essentially they successfully worked as one. Their timing together was fab, and both looked super in their formal attire. Stephanie had great diction and bearing, and a very direct way of addressing the audience which was entirely in keeping. Alan’s more flustered approach as the ‘senior’ and endearing of the two provided Salé with a good foil. Great work both.

Fourchette – Kellie Morgan

Kellie is confident on stage and delivers dialogue with purpose, pace and meaning. She established a strong, loving and facilitative approach to Cuillère ensuring that their parent/child relationship was clear. Her evident vocal talents were put to good use in Act 2.

Cuillère – Anya Frost

Anya was charming as Cuillère, and showed good spatial awareness on stage, and has a nice sense of timing. She contributed really well in the full company numbers, showing lots of potential for the future.

Set Piece 1 – Pete Earl and Set Piece 2 – Albert Roberts

Albert and Pete worked really hard in these roles – from their enthusiastic and well delivered introduction to being candelabras, they were the anchors of the production, and it felt that there were only few scenes where the duo didn’t have some involvement, one way or another.

The Wolves – Megan Palmer/Lauren Carrigan / Jessica Earl /Willow Adams

I’ve mentioned the wolves in previous sections. They worked so well as a pack, each with their own character, and never dropping the stylised movement, even when coming down from the stage. Very well done.

Gaviscon’s adoring ladies – Katie Hinson/Laura Pitchell/Elizabeth Diamond/Nicola Graham-Page

The Brantham groupies did a great job of fawning over men – in the first scene, and then with Gaviscon, and their contribution to full company numbers was pivotal. A special mention to Katie Hinson for strong vocal contribution.

Ensemble/Villagers – Amelia Ramsey/Caz Chapman/Evie-Marie Labon/Paula Graham/Rachel Bach / Rosie Newman

Well drilled, and each exuding their own personality, the villagers projected well and movement was delivered in character. There was lots of good active listening / responding going on, which really improves the dynamic of a scene.

CHOICE OF PRODUCTION / DIRECTION– GENERAL

Tom Whalley pantomimes can be sure to keep audiences entertained, and are full of humour and well-drawn characters.

The decision to use curtains and the big table, meant that on occasion the pace of the production dropped a bit, and this was particularly evident in Act 2. I also felt that Eclairy Fairy could have started some of her dialogue before she reached the front of the stage.

We went home wondering whether the stabbing could have been done any differently, given the current sensitivity of the knife crime issue. I thought that the movements had been well planned and were carefully managed, but the knife itself (although a stage prop) did look quite realistic.

This script allowed for a huge cast to participate, and the standard of individual and ensemble performance was generally very, very good – and something that we have come to expect from BATS over the years. The achievement of a family friendly, inclusive production involving all age groups is no mean feat!

This year was no exception, and Pippa and her team can be proud of yet another BATS panto success. We very much enjoyed the production.

Dawn King
28/02/2026