

**NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD
SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2018/2019**

COMPANY: **BRANTHAM AMATEUR THEATRICAL SOCIETY**

PRODUCTION: **'Off to Treasure Island' by Lisa Butler**

DIRECTOR: **Val Eldridge**

ADJUDICATORS: **Kerry King accompanied by Martin Rayner**

DATE: **21st February 2019**

F.O.H *Tina Burns (F.O.H. Manager)*

I love the buzz at Brantham Village Hall when there is a production being put on with the audience always eager and enthusiastic and of course at Pantomime time this is heightened even more with the children's excitement adding to the overall ambience. There is always a friendly welcome and everything runs efficiently as the group always ensures that their audience are looked after and of course they provide welcome refreshments.

PROGRAMME

The programme was an excellent read with lots of information about the cast and crew, rehearsal photographs, and fascinating facts about 'real pirates'. One of the best programmes I have seen this year, even the pages had titles such as '12 leaks under the sea', very clever!

THE BAND *Carrie Butler. Mark Butler. Jill Harrison. Jay Holloway.
Arnie Blake. (Rosemary Butler. Lewis Martin).*

Once again Brantham did themselves proud with their musicians who not only entertained us with their pre-show music but played instruments that complemented the theme of the show such as a whistle, violins and ukulele. They were both entertaining to watch as they were all in costume, and to listen too as they exuded energy and character and enjoyment which is always contagious. A special mention to both Jay who not only played instruments but also the character of Captain Hornigold (he SO looked and sounded like a pirate!) and Lewis who played Cabin Boy Jim AND the guitar. The band played to cover scene changing which kept up the momentum and entertainment value.

SET/STAGE MANAGEMENT *Kim Swan (Stage Manager) Mark Hinson. Laura Pitchell.
Barry Eldridge. Bob Arnold. Assisted by Ben Cook and Tom Hitchcock.*

The set design certainly conveyed a very good feel for pirate ships and the tavern. The huge capstan that actually turned (very impressive) the barrels and benches with a raised platform at the rear in front of a brick wall immediately gave us a feel of the Anchor Inn. The dockside had a well painted backdrop with wooden rails and rope 'bars'. The very realistic ship's wheel on the raised platform really worked and using the benches for each of the scenes was effective and meant that continuity was not hampered with long scene changing.

Stage management was efficient and scene changes worked well. The bunting on stage, for the walk-down with the bird at the back was fun. Planning and execution by the stage team meant that the pace was not slowed down in any way. We loved the hanging legs!

LIGHTING/SOUND *Greg and Clinton. Ed Chapman and tech' volunteers.*

The band was lit with different coloured gels which were a contrast to the tavern lighting and then the outdoor lighting for the 'ship' scenes. The 'blues' made sure that the sky was accentuated and then a feel of sunshine on the crew. Both lighting and sound for the storm effects were excellent. All sound effects were good in both volume and timing.

SINGING DIRECTOR *Len Stockdale*

There was some great, energetic ensemble singing with harmonies in a couple of the numbers which added to the overall sound. Solo vocals were all great to listen to and diction (which is so important) was always clear. The accompaniments complemented the singing in volume so that we could hear the songs quite clearly. What is always important is the energy exuded, particularly with chorus work, and we could not help but be stirred with the energetic rendition of the chorus songs.

CHILDRENS' DIRECTOR *Alice Harris*

The children were well disciplined in stage presence and were impressively focused on their roles interacting and reacting consistently. They looked good and made a positive contribution to the show. Well done to Alice and all the children involved.

WARDROBE MISTRESS *Tina Burns (also Executive Producer)*

Shows with over thirty cast are not an easy task for the wardrobe mistress so congratulations are in order for ensuring that this show was costumed with great effect. From the Sprites in their purple and gold and blue and silver 'scarf hem' pretty dresses, the cat (excellent make-up and one of the best cats I have seen), to the various pirates costumed to match their status with frock coats and ruffs and pirate hats or bandanas, striped tops, laced boots and leather jerkins. The landlord in his leather apron and attention to other details with matching pockets and scarf and colour coordination, for example. The rats were excellent, Topsy and Turvy wore matching costumes, Captain Sue looked sexy and powerful in her red and black with thigh length boots, and the dames in their two colourful 'over the top' outfits (loved the Bakewell tart boobs!) with coloured wigs added even more visual entertainment. Captain Bertie Bones was ideally dressed in a good 'captains' coat with frilled shirt and a red waistcoat, tricorn hat with a good sword and scabbard. It was evident that each cast member had been thought of with great attention as to the character they were playing. Change of walk-down costumes was excellent as was all the costuming which ensured an effective visual feast.

MAKE-UP *Lucy Rach*

This must have been quite a job for Lucy. Dames' make-up was excellent (apart from the beard) make-up for dames is not always done successfully so well done Lucy! Girl's make-up was just right, and scars here and there for the pirates along with 'seaworthy' faces were well suited to their characters.

PROPERTIES MISTRESS. *Ann Holloway*

Props are an essential part of a production as they have a significant role to play in that they add another facet to the quality of the show. Ann made sure that the props did play their part very effectively and were in keeping with the 'pirate' theme. From the tankards and jugs, barrels and ropes, the map (which looked realistically ancient) basket, bucket and mop, the flour tins and cooking utensils and sausages to the bread sticks, pistol, swords, recipe books, large cooking pan and large cauldron, bunting and bird, there was great attention to detail and props certainly added a positive contribution to the show.

CHOREOGRAPHER: *Frankie Swan*

Frankie made sure that choreography matched abilities with some lovely balletic routines from the dancers and simple routines for chorus work which were effective and obviously well-rehearsed. The sword fight was well considered and choreographed very well.

PERFORMANCES

RAT GANG **KI NG:** *Hulya Donmez.* **QUEEN:** *Lexi Esdale
María Jarques. Connie Lewis. Georgia Long.*

People do not usually like rats but this bunch of rats was special and people loved them. They not only looked good, but moved like rats too. They all interacted with each other; made sure they could be heard and concentrated on what they had to do. Well done.

THE RUNAWAYS *Sophie Mercer (Jane) Rosemary Butler (Ginger - the cat)*

Sophie showed her confidence with good stage presence, a clear voice and reacted well to everything that was going on acting and re-acting well with the other characters. . Rosemary made a superb cat, one of the best I have seen. She almost spoke with a purr at times and her 'cat like' movements and vocals were excellent as was her singing. Rosemary's talent extends to being a band member too as she was the percussionist pre-show.

THE NARRATORS *Geneva Downes as Windy (an air sprite)
Emily Jamieson as Salty (a sea sprite)*

Both Geneva and Emily looked enchanting and each had a character to match their names with Geneva being light and almost 'fluffy' and Emily as unpredictable as the sea being nice one moment and critical the next. Their role was to relate the story to the audience which they did with aplomb.

CREW OF THE DIRTY DEN *Ben Wilkinson (Half-pint Percy). Ali Catchpole (Blackbeard). Mike Brown (Skull-faced Stan) David Mitchell (Dog Watch Davey). Lewis Martin (Cabin Boy Jim). Brian England (Frank the Plank). Arjan van Heuveln (Cut-throat Kurt).*

AND

CREW OF THE SAUCY SUE *Clare Fraser-Hopewell (Cutlass Lil). Phoebe Martin (Cabin girl Bob). Lisa Hinson (Fearsome Fiona). Caroline Chapman (Goldbeard). Marnie King (Heaving Helga). Angie Heath (One-Eyed Mab). Katie Hinson (Seasick Sarah). Grace Bach (Sweet Suzie). Victoria Walton (Mad Molly Morgan).*

Dirty Den and Saucy Sue's crew all played up to their title. Each of the cast not only looked the part but also gave individual performances with different characteristics, yet demonstrated a great 'team spirit'. There was good interaction with each other and energy was boundless which added to the entertainment.

DIRTY DEN'S CAPTAIN *Rob Warne (Captain Bertie Bones).*

Rob was certainly hale and hearty and commanded the stage whenever he appeared. Perhaps he could have encouraged the audience to boo and hiss by being really 'horrible and nasty'! He made a great 'transformation' from being the brusque Captain to a Charming Robert Silver.

DIRTY DEN'S COOK

Geoff Hewitson (Dame Dolly Dumpling).

Geoff's cameo role as one of the Dames certainly made an impression and his enjoyment in this role was evident. It was rather strange having a pink beard as it looked as if someone had gone haywire with the lipstick so it took away one of the most important visual impacts which is the face and make-up. Geoff made the most of this cameo role interacting well with Dame Long Legs Silver.

DIRTY DEN'S FIRST MATE

Lauren Mercer (Roger)

Lauren played a convincing first mate and showed her confident stage presence and acting talent whenever she appeared. Good interaction and facial expressions and a great 'pirate' bearing and manner.

CAPTAIN OF THE SAUCY SUE

Pippa Revell Captain Zelda

We really enjoyed Pippa's performance which was consistently strong in terms of stage presence, energy, believability and how she took control on the stage with her stance and bearing. She looked great, giving out a sensual look in her red and black and she emanated a character that would not take any nonsense and to add to an excellent performance, she has a very good singing voice!

SAUCY SUE'S COOK

Mark Hinson Dame Long Legs Silver

I hope that Mark enjoyed his first performance as a dame as now he has had that experience no doubt he will become a notable dame in future productions. He certainly has stage presence and worked well with the audience and also managed to cope with a couple of hiccups with appropriate banter.

FIRST MATE

Faith Arnold Pretty Polly

Faith played the First Mate with relish, making sure she had all the attributes of a strong right arm man for Captain Zelda. She worked the stage well and her reactions and interactions with the Captain, other members of the crew and the men from Dirty Den were always displayed with confidence.

TOPSY AND TURVY

Jessica Ford (Topsy) *Amber Fisher* (Turvey)

Topsy and Turvey worked really well with each other and brought out some good comic moments. They were full of energy and their non-verbal body language and their asides to each other and others were very good.

CHORUS CHARACTERS

TAVERN OWNER

David Mitchell (Mr Jones)

David has a good authoritative, commanding voice which was well suited to this role and so made rather an impact with this cameo part.

TAVERN OWNER'S WIFE

Clare Fraser-Hopewell

Clare played this as a hard-done by and resigned wife of a tavern owner which was just right for this role!

STREET FOOD SELLER *Caroline Chapman*

Caroline took time off from being Gold-beard to selling food so did well in changing the character's body language and manner as she did.

PRODUCTION/DIRECTION *Val Eldridge* *Author: Lisa Butler*

Writing a script for a pantomime is not an easy task and to have your work produced by such an enthusiastic and talented group must have been delightful for Lisa. From a personal point of view I felt that at times, the audience probably needed a more defined and concise story line and a better link from scene to scene, as sometimes we were not quite sure about the 'plot'. The many different names given to characters were incredible and it must have helped the cast to act and live up to the name they had been given! This was a production that had all the traditional Panto' elements, with rhyming narrators, baddies, dames, and a fun story love story, animals and audience participation.

Over thirty people in the cast can be rather a daunting task but Val made sure that the stage never looked over crowded and positioning was always very effective. The show began with the cast coming on to the stage from all entrances just before 'curtain up' which is always works well, particularly as they were in the tavern which meant that they could be nicely interactive. As the sprites appeared there was a 'freeze' from those on stage which looked good visually.

The Sprites needed to have begun their walk through the auditorium a little earlier as there was always a pause in action until they appeared. If there had been a raised platform (or box?) DRS and DSL with a spot on each Sprite, this would have perhaps made their appearance less awkward (they wouldn't have had to climb the stairs) and more magical.

The pace on the whole was good although there were times when the pace slowed so this could have been someone searching for lines? For example, when the dames were performing their cooking scene with audience participation it seemed to fall rather flat but it may have been that this was an occasion when lines were had gone haywire.

A smoke machine for the fire would have added effect but this may not be possible in the hall.

Lots of thought obviously had gone into positioning everyone on stage as sight lines were excellent and exits and entrances were choreographed really well with levels being used to create effective tableaux. Characters were well defined (although I would have like Captain Bertie Bones to have been much more of a real baddie until he changed character).

A well-conceived, entertaining, enthusiastic, fun and colourful production but then I wouldn't expect anything less from Val and BATS!

Thank you and best wishes to all

Kerry King

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