

Cinderella by Chipperfield Theatre Group

1st of March 2010

I usually cobble these reviews together by scribbling random notes on my programme while the play is in progress then try and make sense of it later. On this occasion it was different – twenty minutes into Chipperfield Theatre Group's Cinderella I could do nothing but cast my pen aside and enjoy the show. Selfish, I know, but so delightful was the performance I couldn't prevent the metamorphosis from critic to fan. From the opening "Potato clock" (up at eight o'clock) joke, this was a two hour nonstop gag-fest as the cast revelled in the unapologetic indulgence of traditional pantomime.

Freya Saddler carried on where she left off, adding Cinderella to her portfolio of lead panto roles. I don't know what else I can say about this girl; suffice it to say that if there was an X Factor for budding stage actresses, she would surely win it. She simply radiates quality. Her on-stage chemistry with James East (Buttons) is already apparent after just two shows together and the latter's contribution too cannot be overstated. He pitched his coy camp charm just right and credit to him for asking "Do you wanna be in my gang?" with a straight face. The last bloke that said that ended up doing a three month stretch in a Vietnamese slammer.

The set was a canvas of colour and, apart from some mischievous wag turning the smoke machine up to eleven, the staging was well managed. Of the supporting cast, Mark Whitewood's bumbling Baron was another success. Kind of Michael Winner meets Boris Johnson but without the wealth or offensive politics. And, of course, anyone fortunate enough to witness previous pantos will know how the males in the troupe revel in dressing up so Cinderella gave ugly sisters, Martin Brett and Paul Instrall, the chance to delve into their closets. They didn't disappoint. They treated their step-sister with suitable disdain but their excellent rapport and flirting with the audience endeared them to us nevertheless. If anything, and this is the problem with the story itself, the only thing missing was an out and out evil baddie. Although with a ghost appearing as if he'd just returned from a Ku Klux Klan convention, and a child in fancy dress being threatened with slaughter mid way through the piece, perhaps the show did, inadvertently, have darker trappings!

If I had one gripe it was that I felt some plants in the audience were too quick to boo or hiss or whoop at the Prince and his consort's thigh slapping (done in perfect synchronicity by the way). Ok, so we weren't blessed with Amy Winehouse in the aisles but neither could we be classed as the prawn sandwich brigade. I think I've been to enough of these shows (all of them fantastic) to know when to heckle. And accordingly I've been to enough of them to know that everyone involved in this wonderful production was well deserving of the spontaneous ovation they received at the curtain call.

Jason Cox