

# National Operatic & Dramatic Association - London Area

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Society: Chipperfield Theatre Group  
Production: Sleeping Beauty  
Date: Thursday 12th January 2006  
Venue: Chipperfield Village Hall  
Report by: Lennie Self

## Report

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A well written script, good direction, colourful costumes, competent actors, an outrageous dame, a good audience with plenty of children and lots of audience participation are the essential ingredients of good pantomime, and fortunately they were all present on Thursday night for CTG's fast moving production of "Sleeping Beauty".

I would like to congratulate Director Wendy Marchant and her team for all their hard work. Choreographer Ros Swallow devised some effective dance routines and on the whole the cast moved well. There were some lovely groupings. However, there were occasions when straight lines needed breaking up into smaller clusters. .

Chipperfield Theatre Group always pay great attention to detail when decorating their hall and the display over the "box office" table in the foyer was as eye catching as ever. When you entered the auditorium you were confronted with the Good Fairy's decorative castle down stage right, opposite the "Bad Fairy's" evil castle entwined with black prickles. With the imaginative use of aprons maximum playing space was created on the small stage. I was pleased to see so many notices (and hear an announcement) warning patrons of the use of strobe lighting.

The recorded music was extremely well chosen, and the performers mainly kept in good time.

The Good Fairy Lilac (Jo Halkett) made an immediate impact. She looked lovely in her costume, projected well and had good audience rapport. Sarah Jayne Bottrill was superb as the "Bad Witch Hazel". Her black ensemble was ideal, emphasizing her trim figure. She created a fabulous character, acting with assurance and quickly gaining the disapprobation of the audience who hissed and booed whenever she appeared. She had a wonderful cackle. There was too much smoke on her first entrance and it entered the auditorium.

The exuberant opening number was very effective, the choreography was good and it was nice to see all the children having a turn at the front of the stage (I know we came on the opening night, but some of the chorus appeared unsure of their moves in this number).

With his small stature and mischievous manner Paul Instrall was the ideal person to play the comic character, Muddles. He always performs with confidence and has very good timing, projection and audience rapport (and quickly covered up an obvious mistake). His costume was wonderful. The tricks with the bench worked well.

In his regal costume and with his majestic stature Simon Phillips looked every inch a King and Sue Harvey made a very good queen. I loved the way Sue spoke. At one time several characters were standing behind the proscenium arch, and then all stepped forward to allow the cloth to drop. It would have looked more natural if the King and Queen had been set further forward from the start of this scene.

Bill Callcut makes a marvellous Dame. He also has good projection and audience rapport and displays the necessary lack of inhibitions. The choice of "Big Spender" for his dramatic entrance from the back of the auditorium was inspired, and he made an immediate impact on the audience as he sashayed up the hall. His wig, make up, costume stance were ideal and his experience showed when he called a momentary forgetfulness a "senior moment" the audience enjoyed his interaction with Brian.

Welcome to newcomer Amanda Cook, who with experienced actress Wendy East made a very good comedy duo, Fetch and Carrie. Her Scottish accent was a good foil for Wendy's comedy estuary accent and she was working all the time she was on stage. The two of them performed well together all evening, particularly when "sorting" the letters, but on occasions they should have slowed their dialogue to allow the audience time to react to the humour.

Amy Brown made a lovely Princess Rose. She projected well, was animated and used her eyes well.. It was good to see a handsome young man playing the Prince. Initially Jack Marchant, playing Prince Alexis, appeared a little self-conscious and unsure what to do with his hands, but he soon settled down and gave a fine performance, speaking clearly. He and the princess looked ideal together

It was inspired direction to set the scene where the princess pricked her finger on top of Witch Hazel's tower, and this created a nice dramatic moment.

Throughout the evening the ladies and children of the chorus worked hard. All the children were delightful but the five rainbow fairies were especially lovely, dancing well and moving gracefully. The younger children danced confidently and the older girls danced well, especially in the cave. Whilst dancing (towards the end of the show) one of the ladies constantly looked at her feet. If you look at the audience and smile they will concentrate on your face, and will not notice if you take a wrong step. The two boys were attentive all evening. I particularly liked the choice of music, and movement for the scene with strobe lighting. The ultra violet scene was very effective.

There seemed to be a hiatus before "If I was not in Cactus Court" and in parts this appeared under rehearsed and the cast needed to spread across the stage more.

The costumes were striking, but the overall medieval effect was spoiled because yet again one lady was wearing spectacles. (I know many local actors who are extremely short sighted who manage to perform on stage without their glasses). The wigs were excellent, and overall the make up was good, but the boys needed some make up as they looked too pale under the lights. On the whole the lighting was very effective.

The seats in row C were placed so close to the row in front that there was very little space and it was impossible to stretch legs.

Overall this was a very good pantomime. The audience obviously enjoyed themselves. And some of the heckling was reminiscent of Music Hall.

Everyone had obviously worked hard to produce the event and I hope the cast had as much fun as the audience. Thank you for an evening of fun and laughter.

With best wishes

***Lennie Self***