

HUNTS POST REVIEW

Little Red Riding Hood at Upwood Village Hall until Saturday, February 2. Review by ANGELA SINGER

THE “most wonderful wolf in the world” turns out to be a well-enunciated blend of Donald Sinden and Lesley Phillips. Opera singer, Martin Muir, is a delicious villain, never mind his howls, listen to his vowels. Of course he would have charmed Grandma, his voice alone.

A lot of the principal parts in this show are played by children. And all the better for it, my dear. They are so completely comfortable on the stage they inhabit their roles. This is a lovely ensemble piece, you never doubt the world they create.

Directors Martin Muir and Fiona Bennett should be congratulated on their attention to detail and making sure that everyone is acting their hearts out - all the time. The cameo roles showed as much subtlety and wit as the main parts.

Stealing the show was Jenny Novice as Larry the Lamb – she made the most of being called to the baa.... Bethany Westcott and Miles Hopkins were glowing as Mrs Gloomdoom and Dracular.

The principles are all stars. It is hard to believe that this was Hannah Butson's first panto. She is a most engaging and accomplished Red Riding Hood, as is Emily Howard as Mary the shepherd.

Lara Comber gave a deftly comic performance as Jason Greenwood and it was a treat to hear her sing. Carole Spibey was a lovely, lively Tom Foolery. You imagine that when she left the stage she was off to do handstands. And Fiona Bennett showed that you don't have to be a camp bloke to play the Dame and be brilliant at it. Her bloomer routine and her jokes were a masterclass. And personally, I believed utterly in Fiona Fairy's magic, presented by Jill Aylin. When she left the stage, I expect she was curled up in a buttercup.

Ripples of laughter went right through this show. The cast were convinced of the panto and just slightly sent it up at the same time. It would be tempting to say that Nutz and Boltz (Doug McLeod and Geoff Dudley) held the thing together – they are an excellent comic duo – with slick timing and body language - but they didn't have to. It all flowed seamlessly with a life of its own. The show has tremendous momentum, all singing, all dancing and all laughs.

Mention should go to Fleur Wallis and Lucy Cuthbert for the inventive choreography – a miracle on such a small stage, to Frances Ashfield for the stunning scenery (and so many scene changes) and Jean Place and Sharon Pollard for the inspired costumes.

How did Upwood attract so much talent in one place? The Wolf captured them and took them there.

NODA (National Operatic and Dramatic Association) REVIEW

UPWOOD VILLAGE HALL PANTO : LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Directors : Martin Muir/Fiona Bennett

Upwood Village Hall and stage are very small. No, even smaller than that! However, the new facilities are excellent and the enthusiasm was particularly evident as the whole of this small village community seemed to come together to present their latest pantomime in a fourteen year run. Imaginative scenery, good lighting effects and a splendid U/V scene all supported a company that worked well together as a team and demonstrated their total enjoyment and commitment. There were particularly good comedy performances from Geoff Dudley and Doug McLeod as Nutz and Boltz, Carole Spibey as Tom and Fiona Bennett as an outrageous Granny Hood. Emily Howard and Jenny Novice also made a nice impression as Mary and her cute but rather vulnerable lamb who, like the other assorted animals and humans in the cast, were under daily threat from the Wicked Wolf (a magnificent interpretation by Martin Muir). Miles Hopkins and Bethany Westcott were suitably evil in Castle Dracula while, as the positive link throughout all this excitement, Hannah Butson was a charming heroine, well supported by Lara Comber as Jason. Both these young principals showed considerable singing and acting ability. Well done.

Michael G Williamson
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