

UPWOOD PANTOMIME COMPANY : BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Director : Martin Muir

Musical Direction : Martin Muir and Neville Palmer

Performed at Upwood Village Hall on 27th January, 2010

During the opening scene a butterfly gently flew across the Village Square of Petitpois and, in some ways, this simple incident encapsulated the charm and attraction of this annual village presentation. Both the Hall and the stage are very small but the Company fully demonstrates, time and again, total enthusiasm, commitment and impressive technical expertise far exceeding the expectations one might have concerning a village production. One gets the impression that nothing difficult is ever avoided and this particular show included dance, comedy, effective transformation, professional effects and a tremendous 'haunted house' slapstick scene. At the centre of the action, the comedy team was particularly fine, incorporating the lively antics of Carole Spibey and Jen Hickman with the consistently strong support of Doug McLeod, Geoff Dudley and Chris Richter, whose facial expressions are very memorable. My favourite this year, however, would have to be Fiona Bennett's outrageous interpretation of Madam Fifi, a performance truly *formidable!* I see a lot of pantomimes but the humour here seemed to be particularly fresh and original. The Rose Fairy and the Enchantress also contributed to the lively atmosphere and fast pace. Being a pantomime horse can have its disadvantages but this one was very well constructed, and Harry and Alex Butson managed their moves in a very expressive and effective way. A great credit to both the Wardrobe team and the actors themselves. Emily Howard made an attractive Principal Boy while, in darker mode, the versatile Martin Muir once again demonstrated his singing ability as the Beast. Belle can be a difficult part to play but Hannah Butson was perfect. She managed to convey the gentle simplicity and basic goodness of the character while, at the same time, displaying a nice sense of humour and a lovely singing voice. A very enjoyable evening of entertainment.

Michael G Williamson

NODA Regional Representative : District 1