

2018 - 2019

**“The Addams Family” presented by St Austell A.O.S.
Seen by Sally Robinson and Sally Chilcott 10 April 2019**

THE SHOW

The characters in this show are based on original cartoons by American Charles Addams and there have been a number of television series featuring the fictional Addams family and a feature-length film. The first time the Addams Family were seen live on stage was in this musical which premiered in 2010 in America and had its first performance in Britain in 2017. The story is a simple one of the Addams daughter falling in love and wanting to marry a boy from the ‘real’ world and the struggles of the two families to resolve several problems and achieve a happy ending. The fast-paced script is full of humour, there is a terrific musical score with many witty musical numbers, and scope for much colourful and lively presentation.

PRESENTATION

Sets: on arrival in the auditorium the audience was treated to a splendid sight of the graveyard where the Addams tomb was situated. A great gate was centre stage and this pulled apart into both wings during the action. The surrounding huge flats and minimal furnishing of gravestones created a spooky cemetery, and we saw a stunted tree covered in cobwebs, and a working entrance to the Addams tomb. This stunning set broke in the middle in spectacular fashion and folded back to reveal the inside of the Addams residence with a staircase leading up to a mezzanine with balustrades on either side. In Act 2 a bed came out from the back wall and was returned to the wall with the help of a huge monster’s foot. A full-scale dining table and chairs were created in moments, furnished with lights and goblets. Painted ‘flock’ wallpaper and wood paneling looked realistic and the twin candle wall lights and huge chandelier contributed greatly. Cobwebs, bats, a coffin with a clock face, fireplace and a lovely bookcase all added to the atmosphere. There was a splendid-looking set of levers at Stage Right which appeared to operate the scenery and the rack to which Pugsley was attached.

Lighting and Sound: the lighting for this show was just about perfect; green and blue lights set the scene in the graveyard and lovely shadows gave the effect of moving trees. The touch of smoke was just right. Colours used inside the house provided the right sense of gloom and yet set off the scenery and furnishings well. Wonderful circulating cog-gobos were used at the time of the big scene changes; lighting changes took place swiftly at the ending of musical numbers; blackouts happened to highlight the appearance of the ‘hand’ and the lightning strike; Gomez was nicely spotlit to talk to the audience. We saw fantastic shaded green lights during the tornado and gobos to enhance this scene; blocks of light on the table during “Full Disclosure” and the red light for the chalice and the tango scene were most effective.

Sound control was also very good. The instruments in the large orchestra produced a beautifully balanced sound and the blend of singers and instruments through the sound system was very well judged, if a little loud in Act I. Control of face mics used by the performers on stage was first-class. Everything could be heard very clearly. Sound effects were good and on cue; fantastic clunking and grinding of gears as the levers were pulled, thunder and lightning, howling wind, buzzing lights.

Costume: this show was beautifully costumed, from the tatty look of Grandma and the elegance of Morticia with her cleavage down to Venezuela, to the wonderfully outfitted Ancestors. Gomez looked appropriately well-groomed in striped suit and patent black shoes, and his wife looked great in her long, figure-hugging, glittery dress. Wednesday always looked smart and beautifully turned out in tunics and spats, Pugsley had a sulky boy look to his trade-mark clothes as well as his demeanour. Grandma was a wonderful creation, dressed eccentrically from a collection of clothes and socks which lived with her in the attic. Uncle Fester looked great in his special overcoat, and Lurch looked just like an Addams butler should look. The Beineke family in contrast looked very normal – a well-dressed group on a dinner date. Mal sported his Grateful Dead T-shirt well at the end, and Fester’s flying helmet and goggles were a good finish to his final appearance on earth.

The costumes of the Ancestors defy description. There were so many wonderful creations in a superb mix of white, cream, grey and hints of gold and silver. All were immediately recognizable from the Caveman through to the crinolined lady, Pirate girl, Restoration Dandy, Flapper Girl, to mention just a few. Each character was so well presented from the hat or bonnet and wig, through the whole outfit to shoes or fine lace-up boots. The enormous care that had been taken in dressing each character in well-fitting clothes was very evident, and the impact made by the whole group was stunning.

Makeup: makeup was good throughout. The Addams family were all in a melodramatic style appropriate for their cartoon-ish characters, and Uncle Fester was a triumph with his white face and head and black eyes and lips. Lurch looked suitably ghoulish. The Beineke family were presented with normal faces, but the Ancestors were all dramatically pale-faced – some with exaggerated tearful makeup and signs of blood. All were individuals, all were ghoulish and could be clearly seen by the audience. We saw some wonderful wigs for the whole cast – all the the historical characters, the black plaits for Wednesday and long black hair for Morticia (our apologies if it was the actress’s own hair), Grandma’s wonderful huge bird’s nest of a hair-piece.

Props: Additional furniture on the set was painted to match the surroundings, including the vicious inquisition chair, the tasseled chaise longue and the robust bed. We saw many props in keeping with the show, such as the flowers, foil, cigars, old photo album, copper tray with glasses (though the contents were not convincing), rugby ball, goblets, candelabras, an arrow-pierced goose, a chalice, and Grandma’s pet rat. The fans in “The Moon and Me” were gorgeous. Wednesday’s crossbow was awesome, and Fester’s rocket looked just about the right size to carry him to the moon. The mouse on the floor was good, the spider very visible and we saw an authentic-looking telephone. Grandma’s trolley and bottles were a good size, and the table and chairs for the dinner party were splendidly presented in just a few moments. Black umbrellas at the end were an appropriate humorous touch, and the moon looked just right. All the props were handled most naturally.

STAGE DIRECTION

We saw a great translation of the script to the stage with a well-rehearsed cast and crew. The show moved at a cracking pace throughout. The whole stage was used to great effect by the cast and never seemed crowded in spite of many people being there; grouping was excellent. Scene changes were well handled by the cast, and entrances and exits were swift and efficient.

Pace and timing were very well judged – especially memorable was the scene with Gomez, Morticia and Wednesday discussing whether the dinner was to be on or not. We enjoyed the introduction of the Addams family to the Beineke family.

Vocal delivery was clear and vocal tone varied. There was great humour in many scenes but drama, too, in the quieter moments.

We loved the clicking ‘hand’ that appeared through the stage floor, the lighting strike that suddenly appeared, Fester flying off the stage and then appearing as the man in the moon, the ancestors’ guiding of the arrow towards Lucas, the Ancestors with twigs on their gloves looking like trees, and the Ancestors being part of many scenes. The breaking of the bird’s neck was gruesome, and the spotlighting of Pugsley when he did the poisoning was dramatic. The mirror and window frames were a clever idea, but handled rather too quickly to be very effective.

Relationships within and between the families were convincing and it was fascinating to watch developments on stage.

MUSICAL DIRECTION

The show was accompanied by a large orchestra of 12 instrumentalists whose playing was greatly enjoyed. A varied score started off with the familiar Addams Family theme and blossomed into many varied musical numbers which were all delivered brilliantly. The sound levels were well judged alongside the voices, and the players accompanied the performers on stage with sensitivity. The volume of everything was a little high in Act I – it was difficult to hear the words in “Trapped” but was better for us in Act II (maybe we were a bit close to a speaker).

Ensemble numbers were pacy and entertaining with harmonies and key changes that showed a well-rehearsed cast. “When you’re an Addams”, “One Normal Night” and “Full Disclosure” were terrific numbers from the whole company in Act I; “Just around the Corner” “The Moon and Me”, and “Move Towards the Darkness” were also splendid deliveries. “Crazier than You” was a complicated number with multiple singers singing different words and this worked very well. Most individual songs were performed with confidence and feeling. “Pulled”, “But Love” and “Waiting” and “Secrets” in Act I, “Just around the Corner”, “The Moon and Me”, “Happy Sad” in Act II – these numbers were especially well delivered.

DANCE DIRECTION

We saw a number of complicated, fast-paced numbers performed extremely well, mostly by the Ancestors. Many of the dancers seemed of professional standard, and we loved the original style of many of the numbers. “When you’re an Addams” was a fantastic opening number with fast slick moves, and very good use of arms and hands. “Secrets” had a splendid dance sequence, the handing of flowers to Gomez across the stage was really original, and the head and shoulder movements in “Full Disclosure” were impressive. Movement during the tornado by the dancers was most effective in enhancing the drama of the storm. The variety of styles – tap in “Just around the Corner”, ballet in “The moon and me” (with an excellent use of fabulous fans), and a great tango routine in “Tango de Amor” – was a great treat for the audience. “What if” was another number beautifully accompanied by the dancers. The dancing on top of Gomez’s feet by Wednesday was a lovely touch.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

MORTICIA ADDAMS: we saw a powerful performance from this actress who portrayed the well-known Addams character most elegantly. Her stage presence was first-class, drawing the attention of the audience at all times. She maintained a languid style and her hand and arm movements were splendid. Her diction was clear, her singing of a high standard and her appearance was exactly right for Morticia. Her relationship with Gomez was very believable, and their tango memorable

GOMEZ ADDAMS: the character of the father of the Addams family whose world was falling into pieces was portrayed well. His relationship with his wife and daughter was totally believable and he conveyed the problems with them that he was facing very well. He maintained his American accent well, the “where we are from” speech was beautifully delivered, diction and singing were good throughout, and comic timing of his sometimes very funny dialogue was excellent. He used his eyes to great effect.

GRANDMA ADDAMS: what a memorable character! From her first appearance we knew we would enjoy this performance. A really eccentric old lady’s character was beautifully depicted, and enhanced by being a member of the crazy Addams family. Comic timing of her dialogue and body language whenever on stage was outstanding. Her costume, wig and makeup helped the whole effect, and we loved her little rat.

WEDNESDAY ADDAMS: this was another really confident performance. There was no doubt of the power this young Addams girl had within the family, and her vocal delivery was terrific, maintaining the accent well; her singing voice was a force to be reckoned with – she coped well with a wide range of difficult musical numbers. Facial expression was excellent at all times, and she owned the stage whenever we saw her. She was a teenager with a great teenage slouch and lounge! Her outfit and makeup enhanced her character.

PUGSLEY ADDAMS: the young boy in the Addams family was well played by this actress and we were here introduced to another very weird member of the family – a stropy child with a difference, his stance just right with the turned-in toes. He played his part on the ‘rack’ very well, and we sympathized with his fear of losing his sister to the strange outsider. Diction was clear, facial expressions were good, and his imitation of Lucas and Wednesday was very well done.

FESTER ADDAMS: this extraordinary-looking character became a thoroughly lovable person from the outset – emphasizing how everyone should pay more attention to LOVE. Delivery of his dialogue and songs was first-class, every word clear, and his facial expression – although surrounded by strong white makeup – was delightful. He sang “Fester’s Manifesto” very well, and his performance of “The Moon and Me” was charming – a nice contrasting lyrical musical number. He carried his hunch-back body around in a wonderfully well-maintained manner, and his disappearance at the end with a rocket on his back and re-appearance as the man in the moon were great moments.

LURCH: the robotic-style butler was very well portrayed; at the opening of the show he amusingly warned the audience of execution if mobile phones were used, and he created great growling noises in place of speech throughout the show until he surprisingly burst into

song. He looked good in his outfit and makeup, and maintained a good stillness when required.

MAL BEINEKE: this character from the 'real' world was a fine contrast to the Addams family and engaged the sympathy of the audience. His diction was good and clear at all times, and he maintained a convincing American accent. His singing in "Crazier than You" was super and his dancing inspired. The transition to his understanding of the Addams family at the end was well portrayed.

ALICE BEINEKE: this was a delightful performance. The all-American 'Mom'/housewife with the future of her son uppermost in her mind was powerfully portrayed. When she morphed into something else after taking the potion and her inhibitions were scattered to the winds, her performance became hilariously comical. Her crawling across the dining table and collapse was very funny. Her diction was strong and clear at all times, and delivery of her lines showed considerable skill in comic timing. Her duet with Morticia was very well performed, and "Waiting" was a terrific and very amusing delivery.

LUCAS BEINEKE: this third character from the 'real' world was well depicted as the suitor of the wild Wednesday Addams. There was no doubt of the great attraction between the two young people (explained clearly in the programme!) and the love of the unlikely couple was convincing. Diction was always clear, we loved his trying to be cool with Pugsley, and he sang well.

THE ANCESTORS: this chorus line-up of Addams Ancestors from Caveman through Charles I, Victorian Lady to Land Girl and modern Flight Attendant is perhaps the most amazing accompanying group we've ever seen. A few of them were on stage most of the time, supporting the action, always in character and always moving in a corpse-like manner when not dancing. Their costumes were wonderful, all in pale grey, cream or white, wigs hats and footwear all beautifully coordinated. They used their extended fingers to make brilliant pictures, and makeup was most appropriate – dramatic and deathlike. The timing of their interjections behind the gates was perfect and their entrances and exits were smooth and slick. Their singing was always first-class and their dancing of a professional standard – always very pleasing.

ENDEAVOUR, ORIGINALITY AND ATTAINMENT

This was a challenging show to stage, but it was a really entertaining production, delighting the audience from start to finish. For those of us who had not seen a professional production of this show it seemed to be full of original and innovative moments; costumes and scenery were outstanding, song and dance were excellent, and the cast and crew must be congratulated on an excellent achievement.

Thank you, St Austell A.O.S. for inviting the CDA to your production again. We had a splendid evening with you and congratulate you on a dynamic performance from everyone. Good luck with your plans for the next production.

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