

CORNWALL DRAMA ASSOCIATION

A SERVICE TO AMATEUR DRAMA IN CORNWALL

THEATRE FESTIVAL 2021-22 MUSICAL, PANTOMIME AND REVUE SECTION.

“SHREK THE MUSICAL”

Presented by St. Austell Amateur Operatic Society

Seen by Margaret Cortis and Soozie Tinn on Saturday, 17th April, 2022

THE SHOW. The popular musical with every ingredient for the enjoyment of both young and old audiences. Comedy, pathos and spectacular effects makes it an excellent vehicle to showcase a company of mixed ages with a depth of talent both dramatically and musically.

STAGE PRESENTATION. Wide, colourfully-painted open stage with entrances at s.l. and s.r. together with a central entrance through horizontal moveable flats opening to allow swift changes of scenery upstage which were managed quickly and competently. The basic set was simple with cut-out greenery, trees, flowers, and amusing ‘keep out’ sign. We saw some excellent additions to the set with Shrek’s house in “The Swamp” and steps to s.l. The curtains opened to reveal a backdrop which, with the use of clever lighting, allowed changes of atmosphere and scenery. The tower for the Princesses was a delight and the quick change to the rotating scenery, depicting the passage of time, was very clever. The bridge looked substantial and was set in a flash. The arrival at Duloc was a lovely scene with sunflowers, rocks and logs and Farquaard’s Castle was impressive. The Dungeon, very dark and forbidding, was ideal for the Dragon’s lair. All the sets were substantial and interesting and the action flowed well without any delays.

LIGHTING. We saw good lighting effects throughout with bright washes of colour and smoke effects where appropriate, together with an impressive purple wash for Lord Farquaard’s chamber and red spots on the bridge. The dungeon looked suitably dark and dingy with red and purple lighting for the dramatic entrance of the dragon. Beautifully-lit sunset with starry backcloth for the night scene and pink dawn-effect. Clever lighting for the shadow on the tent for the transformation of the Princess to the Ogress. Good use of spots on the main characters and subtle changes for the various scenes, well timed and on cue.

SOUND. Excellent sound-effects for the appearance of the dragon and the ‘bodily-functions’ of Shrek and Princess Fiona! Comical screech for the exploding bird, bang on cue. The face mics were well-balanced and the soloists were never overpowered by the orchestra.

COSTUMES. Wonderful set of costumes, starting with the impressive Fairytale outfits for the opening scene with the young Shrek, Mama and Papa

followed by the wonderful selection of costumes for the Fairytale Creatures, each one easily recognizable as their character. Pinnochio's nose was a triumph of ingenuity, as were his wooden knees. The three Bears were a delight, also the Three Pigs and the Wicked Witch was truly frightening, The three Blind Mice were great fun and The Sugar Plum Fairy elegant in her Tu-Tu changing later into the Bishop's robe and Mitre. We loved the Pied Piper with his very smart team of Rats. Each member of the Fairytale Creatures' ensemble wore their costume with aplomb and we could go on.....and on....! Shrek looked just as we would have expected and suitably robust. We did feel that Shrek's feet looked very modern, perhaps if he had worn large, clumsy, bare feet to match his hands he would have looked more Ogre-like. The donkey's outfit was wonderful, finished off with great hooves and magnificent ears. The green gown for Princess Fiona was striking and fitted well as did her Wedding Dress. The younger Princesses matched Fiona well. We understood that Lord Farquaard's 'undercarriage' had to be 'customised' to fit and it worked brilliantly also adding so much to his character. Lord Farquaard's Guards looked very smart in their uniforms and we loved the red and blue outfits for the citizens of Duloc. The "I love Duloc" T-shirt was a nice touch. This was an impressive set of costumes, colourful and all fitting beautifully.

MAKE-UP AND WIGS. The complicated character make-up was handled extremely well, Shrek's bald wig was excellent as was Princess Fiona's transformation. Well-fitting red wigs for the Princesses. The sets of black wigs for the Guards and Lord Farquaard, also the blond wigs for the Duloc citizens were very smart. The Donkey and all the Fairytale had excellent character make-up and, as mentioned, The Wicked Witch and Pinocchio had spectacular noses. The-non Fairytale characters in the ensemble all looked natural.

PROPERTIES. Substantial swords for the Guards and Lord Farquaard's horse with comic armour was brilliant. The Dragon was a triumph, it looked truly fearsome and was handled with great skill. The exploding bird was funny and the selection of Puppets, particularly the deer with removable antlers and the Gingerbread Man were well-made. The rat on the car was cute and the toasted sandwiches another nice touch. Shrek's oversized helmet was impressive.

MUSICAL DIRECTION. This being a show with mostly musical numbers rather than dialogue it relied on a cast of singers with strong voices and an ability to undertake some difficult harmonies, particularly the principal characters and you are fortunate to have members who were equal to the task. There must have been a tremendous amount of hard work and rehearsal from the company and the Musical Director to provide such a polished performance. Excellent harmonies in "Big Bright Beautiful World" and a rousing "Story of my life" and "The Goodbye Song" from the Fairytale Creatures. "Don't let me go" was another winner from Donkey. The singing, coupled with the movement in "What's up Duloc" was outstanding. The three Princesses performed "I Know it's today" with great feeling and excellent harmonies and "This is how a dream comes true" was a real show-stopper. Fiona's "Morning Person" and "I think I got you beat" were a great opening to Act 2 followed by "The Ballad of Farquaard" which was a delight. "When words fail" was poignant and heartfelt from Shrek as was "Build a Wall". The Fairytale Creatures excelled themselves in the "Freak Flag" number and "Beautiful aint always Pretty" was sung with great feeling by Shrek. The singing and movement in the Finale number was full of energy and enthusiasm, delighting the audience which was evident from the response and applause.

STAGE DIRECTION. This was a very ‘tight’ production with one scene slipping seamlessly into the next, which indicated a huge amount of hard work and rehearsal, particularly in view of the difficulties caused by the Pandemic. The bright, fairytale-like scenery and superb lighting was a terrific contrast to the ambiance of the dark and dingy prison scene with the old knights in the Dragon’s cage. The entrance of the fabulous dragon was unobtrusively and professionally handled and one of the highlights of the show, he actually looked as if he was singing! Entrances and exits were crisp and swiftly accomplished for such a large company and the various scene changes handled with ease. We enjoyed the inspired additions to the script, e.g. Farquaard’s keep-fit antics on the horizontal bar and the air-guitar crossover. The swift movement of Lord Farquaard using his full stature, where required, was amusing. As mentioned above, we thought that Shrek would have benefited from outsized, clumsy bare feet which would have given him a more pronounced uneven gait in keeping with his character. We were impressed with the three Princesses and the scene was believable that they could have been the same person growing up. The combining of the musical numbers and dance routines worked very well with good groupings, particularly of the Fairytale Characters and the members of the Ensemble are to be congratulated for their superb energy and obvious enjoyment which came over in spades. The scene to stop the wedding was very powerful and convincing, loud and raucous. The sadness of Shrek when he thought he was being rejected by the Princess was well-acted. Their tender coming together was a lovely contrast and they were well-cast duo. Good accent from Donkey and a definite Scottish lilt from Shrek. Lots of thought and hard work had gone into this splendid production which was much enjoyed by the capacity audience.

DANCE DIRECTION. We saw some extremely well choreographed ensemble pieces together with very professional dance routines. The “Story of my life” and the “Goodbye Song” were two terrific numbers getting the show off to a good start and “What’s up in Duloc” was outstanding. We all love a tap number and the Rat’s with the Pied Piper and Fiona gave us a real winner. The patterns formed in the ‘Freak’ number, to accommodate all the characters in the choreography worked really well and the Finale number “I’m a Believer” brought the house down.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES.

SHREK. This actor had an impressive singing voice and sang his numbers with strength and feeling. His duets with Fiona were a delight and we really felt for him when he thought that she had rejected him. “Build a Wall” was poignant and “Big bright beautiful world” was sung with great emotion. The trio, “This is how a Dream Comes True” with Fiona, and the Dragon was memorable. We felt that he could have been a little more fierce and ogre-like in the first act but his rapport with Donkey was first class and his bolder movements and strong portrayal of the character really came through in the second act particularly his scenes with the Dragon.

FIONA. A really first-class performance from this actress, commanding the stage from her first entrance. “I know it’s today” with the younger Princesses had super harmonies. “This is how a Dream comes true” and “Morning Person” were great numbers. This was a really “sparky” interpretation of the character showing her versatility in acting, singing and dancing. We particularly liked the progression of her relationship with Shrek which was believable and nicely portrayed.

DONKEY. Outstanding portrayal of this wonderful character, well-maintained accent throughout with expressive eyes and engaging smile. Good all round performer, showing frustration with “Shrek” yet showing great understanding and fondness for him and trying her best to show him that he had a future with Princess Fiona. Lovely number with the Three blind mice”, good dancer and singer.

FARQUAARD. An experienced actor who managed his false legs with great skill and panache ‘bringing the house down’ at every appearance. We enjoyed his occasional full-height dash around the stage which was very funny and his appearance with his horse and ‘prothesis leg armour” was inspired and looked great. Good strong delivery, wonderful facial expression and an excellent singing voice. We loved his childlike excitement when Princess Fiona was about to arrive. Great costume which fitted his stature amazingly well.

DRAGON. Possibly the finest dragon ever seen in the South West and operated skilfully and professionally by three members of the cast. Strong clear singing voice and splendid roar. We loved his final appearance for the finale.

CHILD FIONA. A delightful performance from this young actress who looked charming and held her own in both singing and acting with the older Princesses. A talent for the future.

ADOLESCENT FIONA. Very attractive teenage Fiona with lots of attitude which was a contrast to the other two. Lovely singing voice. A star in the making!

THE FAIRYTALE CREATURES. As mentioned, each creature was recognisable as their particular Fairytale character and showed energy and enthusiasm throughout the Show. Their costumes were a delight and added so much colour and interest to the ensemble.

PINOCHIO. Certainly stood out from the crowd with great make-up and costume and we could hear every word even with the high-pitched delivery.

MAMA BEAR. Wonderful costume and really lovable character with a strong delivery.

GINGERBREAD MAN. Comical well-synchronised puppet, good delivery and great animation.

BISHOP. A dual role as the Sugar Plum Fairy and a strong Scottish accent for the Bishop in impressive robes. Strong delivery and good facial expression.

ENSEMBLE. What a wonderful team, high energy and enthusiasm which never dipped. We saw smiling faces throughout and everyone appeared to be enjoying themselves as much as the audience. The singing and dancing was of a very high standard and you are indeed fortunate to have such a wonderful company of talented players.

ENERGY, ORIGINALITY AND ATTAINMENT.

Supercharged energy and enthusiasm throughout in a show full of great music, dance and unusual characters. Some very clever additions to the original story which enhanced the evening's entertainment, very much enjoyed by the capacity audience.

CONCLUSION. We have waited a LONG time to see this show and it did not disappoint. We hope to be invited to come and see your next production and thank you for making us so welcome. Here's to the next time.

PRESENTED BY ST. AUSTELL, AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY
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