

SALOS

The Wizard of Oz.

Wyvern Theatre, Swindon.

October 22nd 2016

Director: Russell Langdown

Associate Director: Sandra Gilbert

MD: Malcolm Webb

Choreographer: Gemma Short

This was the first time SALOS had staged the ever-popular Musical, The Wizard of Oz. They chose the Royal Shakespeare Company adaptation which closely follows the 1939 film, complete with well known characters of Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tin Man, Cowardly Lion and of course Toto the dog. We did not have the opening sequences in black and white, but the colours were muted compared with later scenes in Munchkinland and The Emerald City.

The set for the Gales's Farm in Kansas had a painted back-cloth, which gave the feeling of vast expanses of Prairie going off into the distance, a practical house and a practical storm cellar, both vital to the story. This was a very technical show with many changes of quite spectacular sets, characters flying in, excellent projections, pyrotechnics and lovely effects. The effect when the Wicked Witch of the West was flying round worked well. There was very atmospheric lighting used throughout and especially in the forest and witches castle. The stage crew under the management of Sarah Wrixon, worked very efficiently to make sure scene changes went smoothly and with very little fuss. The storm effects leading up to it were excellent. The costumes were spot on, showing good contrast between 'real life' in Kansas and the colourful world of Oz. They enabled everyone to move freely, so important for Tin Man and Scarecrow, and helped create the characters.

The orchestra, under the direction of Malcolm Webb, played well and were well balanced, if a little loud at times, but musicians and voices were always together. The standard of singing was good with clear diction in all musical numbers. I did wonder if having the orchestra under the stage created a few problems, as several times the stage had been set and the actors ready to start and the orchestra were still playing, which disturb the flow of the action.

There was some energetic, inventive choreography from Gemma Short, everyone looked well rehearsed and confident in the routines. The one thing that always strikes me when I see this show, is that some of the Dance numbers are very long and would benefit from being shorter, and I think the very fidgety child next to me agreed.

This show gives the opportunity to use a wide age range of performers and there were two teams of youngsters in the production. The group I saw were well disciplined in all aspects of stagecraft, and performed confidently, all very much at ease on this large stage. They were well supported by the adult ensemble giving a variety of ages, which created the feel of a real community. The four main characters worked well together creating strong characters, a good sense of camaraderie, all singing and moving well. The three men created their dual roles well.

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough PE2 7UH

Tel 01733 374 790 **Fax** 01733 237 286 **Email** info@noda.org.uk **Web** www.noda.org.uk

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From her first entrance there was no doubting that Sally Rudd was Dorothy, she portrayed the gammut of emotions the character goes through with maturity. She was confident in her acting and dancing, and sang all her numbers well, and 'Over The Rainbow' with great feeling. Tony Asprey made a convincing scarecrow, although the crows did not seem to think so. His movements after he leaves his pole and tries to walk were excellent, totally believable as someone learning to walk on straw filled legs. What a sorrowful character Christopher King as Tin Man was with his tragic story of how he came to be as he was. Again his movements helped make the character totally believable with the right amount of stiffness and not going over the top. Stuart Dark, as the Cowardly Lion, really was an oversized pussycat, even his attempts at being brave, made you want to give him a cuddle, he was lovely. Judith Sharp, in the dual roles of Aunt Em and Glinda, showed excellent characterization, the kind but overstressed Aunt, and the benevolent serene good witch Glinda. I forgot that the same person was playing both roles; Glinda exuded 'goodness' every time she spoke or sang. Chris Coleman, as Uncle Henry and the Guard in Oz, gave good character definition, I liked the scene when they arrive at The Emerald City and try to gain admission, good timing. Ray Dance was very intuitive as Professor Marvel realising he had a runaway on his hands and being gentle with her. He displayed similar intuition when dealing with our four friends, and his reluctance to leave the Ozians without a leader, until he felt someone else could do the job, came over well. Nicola Burrridge was very unpleasant and vindictive as Miss Gulch, but became scarily evil as The Wicked Witch of The West. I liked her entrance through the roof of the ruined house. All those playing minor roles of Trees, Crows, Flying Monkeys, Dignitaries of Munchikinland and the Guilds, contributed well to the production. Last but not lest the wonderful Indy as Toto. I am sure this is just the start of her bringing much joy to many people.

Director Russell Langdown had worked well with his talented, enthusiastic cast, choreographer and technical team to bring this well loved story to the stage. The stage was well used and good use was made of entrances through the Theatre. There were some lovely moments, such as the breaking of the Poppy Spell and the demise of the Witch and the return to Kansas. Well done everyone on an entertaining evening.

Frankie Telford.
Regional Representative. District 15.

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