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## SALOS

### ELF – THE MUSICAL

As seen by Matthew Heaton (NODA South-west Regional Editor) for Debi Weaver (NODA SW District 13 Representative) on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Director:** Russell Langdown  
**Musical Director:** Richard Abrams  
**Choreographer:** Gemma Langdown  
**Associate Director:** Sandra Gilbert  
**Chorus MD:** Judith Sharp

#### The Wyvern Theatre, Swindon

*Elf – The Musical* is the stage version of the Classic 2003 film, starring Will Farrell. It tells the story of Buddy the Elf, who after discovering he is in-fact human (and not an Elf), travels from The North Pole to New York to find his real Dad and step-family, before ending up saving both Santa and Christmas!

This is a well-known and much-loved seasonal story and has some serious staging requirements to overcome to be successful. I am very pleased to say that accommodated both challenges with consummate ease and put on an excellent and very enjoyable production.

The stage in the Wyvern is a large space and you'd chosen wisely with your quality hired set which fitted well and looked great. Transitions were often complex and largely flown in, often in blackout to scene change music, which was quite necessary but did not detract from the performance. The flying Sleigh that came out over parts of the audience was an absolute triumph and gave a real wow factor to the end of the production, as did the snow effects. The stage area was well-used, with some side and audience entries to keep interest and variety.

The lighting design and application was excellent overall, with some great uses of colour in the songs in particular, as well as significant moving head and haze effects. 'Nobody Cares About Santa' was particularly memorable. These effects worked really well too out over the audience for the Sleigh scene. Some of the scenes set in the auditorium itself were not fully lit, making the cast difficult to see at times but overall the lighting was a very memorable part of the production. Nice fun effect of Santa's Sleigh across the sky too.

The sound and balance were generally very well-controlled. The orchestra did occasionally overpower the voices when they were at their loudest. However, radio microphone management had excellent cueing and control.

The costumes were excellent in terms of both quality and fitting – from the army of Santa suits through to the New York street and office attire. The elves on their knees were terrific and really made the opening scene with Buddy all the more hilarious. The white outfits at the end made a fitting finale. Hair and Make-up (including the Wigs used), though not a key feature of the production were good too. Properties, where used, all seemed appropriate and of the period.

The quality of direction was very high. In reviewing the principal performances:

#### National Operatic and Dramatic Association

15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough PE2 7UH

Tel 01733 374790 Fax 01733 237286 Email [info@noda.org.uk](mailto:info@noda.org.uk) Web [www.noda.org.uk](http://www.noda.org.uk)

Twitter @NODAtweets Facebook NationalOperaticDramaticAssociation

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- **Buddy the Elf (Jarred Barnard-Cremin).** This was an incredible performance – you were a genuine triple threat – and acted, sang and danced the role completely. Your enthusiasm, energy, charm and comic-timing took the whole audience with you as you transformed those around you on stage. You also held the whole performance together. Extremely well done.
- **Jovie (Katherine Cooke).** You played the role of Buddy's girl-friend really well, taking us on the journey from scepticism to affection. There were lovely singing performances in your solo 'Never Fall in Love (with an Elf)' and your duet with Buddy of 'A Christmas Song'.
- **Walter Hobbs (Stuart McQuade).** A really well-acted part, as you took us from angry office manager to fun-loving father of both Buddy and Michael. Moved and sang well as required too.
- **Emily Hobbs (Jill Carter).** This was a strong performance as the wife of Buddy's father. There were some lovely singing numbers with Michael too in 'I'll Believe in You' and 'There is a Santa Claus', which were a real highlight of the show. Well done!
- **Santa (Ray Dance).** A charming performance at Santa, with some great work (and great ad-libs) with the audience and Buddy in particular. Great work!
- **The Manager (Luke Browne).** Nicely done as the Manager and boy, could you dance when you were needed!!
- **Deb (Lydia Barnes).** A really mature performance as you made this part your own. Acting, singing and dancing were all great.
- **Greenway (Holger Alsmeier).** Walter Hobb's boss was overdone in character and good fun!
- **Michael Hobbs (Barnaby Sutcliffe).** This was a really nice performance and you were able to show off your lovely singing voice. Well done!

The cast in the ensemble supported the production really well too. They were given plenty to do, from Elves to New Yorkers to Santas, which they took on with energy and ability. The Choreography was impressive too. There were some great choreographed numbers, including 'Sparklejollytwinklejingle' in Macy's, 'Nobody Cares About Santa' and the Finale. You used your natural dancers well for the big set pieces and combined them skillfully with the rest of the cast for the simpler numbers, which worked really well. The roller blades and skates for the ice rink were very effective.

The chorus singing itself was very good too – with some great harmonies. The music itself was very well put-together and controlled by the Musical Director. The quality of the orchestra's playing was excellent and greatly enhanced the overall performance.

In summary, *Elf – The Musical* was a great production and a really wonderful night-out. The performances, the music and the staging all worked really well and the cast and crew are to be warmly congratulated on their achievements – it deserved a bigger audience. Thank you to Alan Wrixon for looking after us for the evening and for Russell for spending the time to meet us both. I wish you every success with your future productions.

#### PLEASE NOTE:

*Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what he sees at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance and it is inevitable that his assessment will be effected by that knowledge.*

*The N.O.D.A. Representative's intention is to give an objective critique of the overall production and in particular the performance viewed. It should be remembered that any review of this nature can only be objective as far as the techniques used during the performance observed. Any criticisms expressed may not have been valid at other performances, and are only made to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.*

*It is hoped that the audience's appreciation of your efforts will have given everyone a lift and encouraged you to greater achievements in the future and that the observations made by the reviewer will prove helpful in improving future productions.*

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