

# Cinderella 2009

As a participator in amateur dramatics for thirty plus years and a father and grandparent I have enjoyed or suffered more amateur (and professional) pantomimes than many. And sometimes it *has* been suffered, especially with the modern professional pantos where the inclusion of two soap stars that no one (or certainly me) has heard of, plus a geriatric pop star, are felt by the management to overcome a miserable, smutty script and acting that would make Hornshurst Woods look dynamic.

But not in Rotherfield. Jon Alcock has written and directed a triumph. He has put on a production that told that simple story we all know so well with such clarity, humour, joy and pathos that I wished it would never end. I found myself genuinely moved when Buttons told of his love to Cinderella and she so full of love for the Prince/Dandini but caring for her friend; I just hated the way the Ugly Sisters behaved; I cheered at the appropriate parts; laughed until the tears came so many times, and marvelled at the sheer quality of the performances – not least from the youngsters. It was a live theatre performance in the best of genuine panto traditions. And it managed to be ‘village’ as well. What a fitting show for the 100<sup>th</sup>.

I am now looking through the notes I made during the performance and I am overwhelmed with my scribbled comments of individual performances/moments. The youngsters were terrific. Always smiling, singing well, and acting well. The Players care in bringing on young talent really shows. The orchestra, as ever, were such a huge asset to the show. And as for Sue Burnett’s one-handed virtuoso performance, well! The sets were deceptively simple and worked well and the transformation scene was handled beautifully.

Where to begin with the principals? The Brokers Men gave a funny and dynamic performance and all credit to Paul McNally as a relative newcomer for ‘coping’ with James Gallifant’s usual larger-than-life personality. Peter Whittington gave his expected professional and subtle performance. And he is so good with the stand-up comic lines which Jon had provided in such number. Comedy Club next Peter? The Ugly Sisters – Jimmie Walton-Turner and Simon Kerr-Davis (*that’s* why I never had a part as an ugly sister, no double barrelled name!) were I think the best dames I’ve ever seen in a local production. Their mixture of high camp and Hinge and Bracket worked the audience beautifully. And those dresses! Adam Hardy was everything one expects of a Buttons, in turn funny, sad, controlling the audience and providing bounce. Becky Syms was superb as the Fairy Godmother. In turn clever, arch, and raunchy she was a joy of a character. Heather Campbell and Kate Awcock were perfectly matched as the Prince and Dandini and the changeover in roles was handled perfectly. The boots, tights and thigh slapping were *very* good and brought pleasure to an old reviewer. And finally Natalie Sexton as Cinderella was that wonderful mixture of fragile prettiness, filial loyalty and first love, in a character with underlying strength.

A word on the singing. It was good, very good. So often the singing in other groups’ productions is passable but no more: this was good and gave the audience genuine enjoyment in each number. As was the choreography: so often indifferent in amateur productions, this was splendid. And I cannot imagine how hard Sophie Richardson worked in the weeks running up to first night holding everything together.

The costumes were excellent and all carefully chosen to suit individuals and their characters. In fact *everyone* in the supporting roles did well from props, stage manager, sound, lighting, programs to front of house. Congratulations to you all.

Andy Miller