

“Goldilocks and the Three Bears”

Rotherfield Players’ production of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” in the Village Hall was a colourful, lively and musically delightful show. Pantomime gives the appearance of being all effortless fun for those involved, yet it is notoriously difficult to direct and requires incredibly hard work from actors and back-stage crew.

Steven Spedding successfully made his directorial debut with this very amusing pantomime. Together with Producer Ros Williams, he was blessed with an excellent team. No show gets off the ground without a strong back stage crew. Under Stage Manager Charles Truelove, the attractive scenes were changed slickly. Sheila Comben produced some excellent properties, and the fabulous costumes were colourful and attractive, thanks to Helen Gallifant and her team.

Suzanne Burnett, Musical Director, nurtured the growing number of singers in the Players. Wisely she kept each song short, so the audience was left wanting more. Choreographer Catherine Ireland used the talents of the youngsters in the chorus to produce some charming dances – particularly the clog dance. Young Phoebe Tunstill was exemplary, showing pure enjoyment, smiling even when singing.

In pantomimes the plot is only loosely related to the old fairy tale – indeed, the three bears did not appear until the second half. The pompous King Philip of Beardonia (Adam Hardy) and his wife, Queen Elizabeth (a beautiful character portrayal by Lynn Lunn) were desperately hoping that their daughter, Princess Paula (a charming Heather Campbell) could marry a rich prince and so lift them out of poverty. Their hopes were dashed by the wicked witch Maria, played with great gusto and blackened teeth by Ros Williams, who turned them into the three bears.

At last a thigh slapping Prince of Happy Land (Becky Syms) appears to rescue everyone from the witch, with the help of Mother Hubbard’s dog, Fido, (Jess Hardy)

The star of the show to many members of the audience, both young and old, was the ditsy Fairy Light. As a comedy actress Clare Carruthers excelled herself. She made a delightful character role out of what could have been a rather bland good fairy.

Every good pantomime must have its dame, and James Gallifant played Mother Hubbard with incredible energy and panache: He/she ended up marrying Baron Not-a-Lot (Mike Hewett) who managed to be a bit of a baddy and yet keep the audience’s sympathy for his fate worse than death. Kate Awcock made a winsome Goldilocks. Playing opposite her, Emma Williams made a delightful Simple Simon, with her Dorset accent and her numerous stage falls. More slapstick was provided by Mike Baldwin and Louise Payne as the Baron’s inefficient henchmen. Louise comes into her own as a character actress, her sharpness as Grabbit nicely foiled by Nabbit’s slow-wittedness and, at times, pathos.

There are too many parts to mention everyone, except to say Les Pike won the part of the Wolf in an auction of promises and he certainly showed great promise.

Was there anything to criticise? If I am nit-picking, I could say the first half of the show was too long – some of the rather repetitive slap-stick could have been pruned. At times the grouping was ragged so that some character or action was hidden at a crucial moment. Although generally effective, the lighting was too dim when the witch came on, so that her gruesome facial expressions were in shade. Some of the newer members needed to project more, but this will come with experience. There is a lot of promise there.

This was a real traditional family pantomime, enjoyed by both young and old.