

PERFORMANCE **REVIEW**

Title	Babes in the Wood	Date	7th February 2015
Genre	Pantomime	Society	HATS
Venue	Holsworthy Theatre	Reviewer	Ian Goodenough

Please note: Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what they see at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance and it is inevitable that their 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.

The annual pantomime by HATs is always a crowd-pleaser but with this year's "Babes in the Woods", the society really seemed to have upped their game, by producing a funny show with great pace and ingenuity.

First good choice was the script. HATs are great script choosers - something that is so important to a production. It isn't enough to pick a title that sounds like it will 'sell' if the casting and writing will have a detrimental effect on the show and society's reputation. In the case of "Babes in the Wood", HATS chose a sturdy script that they knew (as panto-pros) they would be able to embellish and produce something special.

And they did just that.

The cast were fab, with all the traditional characters showing their faces. Comic capers and general baboonery was provided by henchmen Floggem & Whippem - they worked well as a team demonstrating great comic timing and rapport with the audience. Meanwhile their boss, the evil Sheriff, elicited plenty of Boos and Hisses from the audience and dominated the stage whenever he was present, much in the same way the excellent Dame (Nurse Jemima Jollop) did. She was stunning (metaphorically), festooned as she was in various OTT costumes, each larger and grander than the next. Never 'camping it up', she played the dame just right - and she got the audience whooping, hollering and heckling perfectly. I'm fairly sure the audience were performing their own script with her at one point!

Jemima wasn't alone with her impeccable wardrobe as the whole cast was decked out in fantastic costumes, which was not a surprise as HATS never dress their cast in anything less than the best!

Robin Hood and his nifty fight scenes with sticks and swords was every bit the hero, ...

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

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Along side Robin were his band of trusted 'Merry Men', who brought more fun to the show (particularly with their 'Men in Tights' number!!), supporting the strong company's performance. In fact their efforts strongly echoed the rest of the chorus, who were also strong onstage, always engaged in the action (rather than staring blankly at whomever happened to be talking - I hate that!) and interacting within their own groups. Tribute to a strong director who takes in the 'big picture' and doesn't get distracted by those pesky principles!

Still learning their crafts, the Babes were sweet and innocent and Green Willow was the voice of 'good' in the forrest, representing nature and getting shouts from us all when her magic 'listening tree' sprang into life - while her opposite in magic was the incredible Nell Nightshade. She was superb, in character, comic timing and stage technique in general - such strong talents as Nell and the other principles are great assets to the society and, at the risk of sounding weird, I hope HATS are taking full advantage of them in developing their younger members!

From a staging point-of-view here were some very well executed ideas. In particular the 'Spooky Bedroom' scene (one of many very nice sets) in which ghosts appeared behind doors, bedsheets vanished and a headless spook appeared, whose lips still moved despite being located under his arm with the rest of his bonce.

It was also a very clever trick to setup the 'haunted' portrait of Sir Willfred as a video projection. I always love seeing this kind of innovation and this worked very well. Ignored by the cast onstage, Sir Wilfred thoroughly entertained us all with his facial expressions and drunken antics.

Choreography was kept simple and although it was a little repetitive in places, gave the show enough movement to keep it fresh and mixing in some tracked music amongst that provoked by the small band. I particularly liked the dance with the toys, which was clever, funny and a creative idea. While the singing from the cast was un-complicated, it worked well and had been arranged in such a way that it kept the show flowing and felt like each number belonged, rather than being jammed into place.

I was worried that the final number was going to be a bit slow, but it ended up being a very uplifting number with some clever use of torches, which spurred the audience into whipping out their phones to shine back, rock-concert style!

In fact I would say I enjoyed this performance from beginning to end - even the dreaded sing-a-long in which I participated loudly (us men were robbed of our victory, but I'll not hold that against anyone)!

I thought last year's production was good. This year you topped it. I can't wait for 2016!

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