



teur theatre

Society : The Sainsbury Singers
Production : The Wizard of Oz
Date : Friday 19th May 2017
Venue : Hexagon - Reading
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

I have seen this version of Wizard of Oz on numerous occasions and find that I enjoy it more each time I see it. This was a great performance with some excellent characterisations and the audience enjoyed every moment from start to finish.

I am not a huge fan of starting a show with the prosceniums open and characters going about their business! However it was well done and the performers kept their characters for the duration.

Lorraine Cox – (Dorothy) – This was a lovely performance and though at the start I felt she was trying to emulate Judy Garland through her dialogue accent and movement; she found her way and became more herself as the show progressed. She was delightfully animated with energetic lively dialogue and natural easy movement. She forged great relationships with her three traveling companions and together they made a formidable diverse team. She coped admirably starring with her canine companion **Peppa** – (Toto) who could do nothing to upstage her no matter how cute she was. Her singing voice was enjoyably pleasant and all her numbers were well sung in character especially “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”. Whether your MD had told you to swoop down your note on “Me” to “Somewhere” I don’t know; however I would have preferred a clean break!

Gareth Wells – (Hunk/Scarecrow) – Whilst I would have liked to have seen more lithesome flexibility in his movement the actual characterisation was superb! His makeup truly enhanced the visual effect as it gave the impression that he was constantly smiling. Of the three friends this young man had by far the superior singing voice. His rendition of “If I only had a Brain” was outstanding.

Stephen Cox – (Hickory/Tinman) – Of the three companions Tinman is the one which requires most thought in order to establish a realistic character. Here the portrayal was perfect with the ideal mix of sadness and optimism. His movement was stilted as befits the Tinman and he maintained this throughout including the dances. His dialogue was crisp articulate and audible with excellent inflexion. “If I only had a Heart” was well sung and the sentiment came across emphatically!

Brian Bretney – (Zeke/Lion) – This was another actor that appeared to be trying to reproduce the character created by Bert Lahr in the film instead of putting his own stamp on it. That said I really enjoyed his performance! His dialogue was strong and powerful and movement energetic and agile so that he performed all routines with free abandon. A right royal “King of the Forest” was exceptionally well sung!

Emma Reeves – (Aunt Em/Glinda) – As Aunt Em she created a warm caring persona with excellent ebullient dialogue. Interaction with her fellow actors was spot on and her relationship with Henry and Dorothy perfect. She looked congenial and had natural fluid movement. As for Glinda I was really struck with modern touch that she brought to the role. Her dialogue was natural yet spirited and her whole demeanour was absolutely perfect. Movement was aptly genteel and graceful and her singing strong and tuneful.

Kazia Grainger – (Miss Gultch/Wicked Witch) – I would have liked this young lady's character to have been a little more formidable as the evil Miss Gultch. Her dialogue was well delivered with good dynamics but lacking in the haughtiness I associate with the character. I am a firm believer in putting a new spin on a character providing it works for the better. I absolutely loved the way this actress played the witch; it was the likes as I have never seen before but was simply sublime. Her dialogue delivery and movement were as up to date as it comes yet absolutely ideal!

Rob Latimer – (Uncle Henry/Guard) – As Uncle Henry this was a sound performance; he had created an amiable likeable character who liked to make out he was in charge. His dialogue was clear and well projected and his movement perplexed and agitated. He created a good rapport with Em and Dorothy which was totally believable. As the guard he really brought the proceedings to life. He was lively spirited and energised. His dialogue was vivid and enthusiastic with perfect diction. He moved with a buoyant spring in his step and performed his routine with efficacy. "Merry old Land of Oz" was sung with gusto and was most enjoyable.

Chris Reeves – (Professor Marvel/Wizard of Oz) – In both roles this young man had created well delineated characters. His sense of comedy was sublime and timing perfect. His dialogue was animated clear and well projected. He looked totally at home both as Professor Marvel and the great Wizard himself; with natural movement and good gesticulation.

Hilary Latimer – (Munchkin Teacher)

Katie Wise – (Munchkin Teacher)

Chris Thomas – (Munchkin Mayor)

Jessamy Vincent – (Munchkin Barrister)

Michael Schult – (Munchkin Coroner) – This quintet was excellent they each had very defined characters that enhance the scene famously. They all had good visuals expressive dialogue and produced some first rate singing.

Joanne O'Mahoney – (General of the Winkies) – Although this was a cameo role this young lady played her part splendidly. She had an upright military bearing and her movement complemented this; with dialogue that was crisp clear and audible.

Catherine Hannan – (Fake Wizard) – Another cameo role that had more to it than met the eye. It took a lot for this actress to do nothing but sit there reacting not reacting just being!

Amy Hale/Cath Hannan/Jackie Stoffels/Helen Thomas – (Crows) – What great fun these four young ladies were! They created some great business and individual characterisations. They produced some high quality dialogue and singing, (though the masks did muffle the voices on occasion) enhancing the humour of the scene.

Sara El-Hanfy/Lucy Hutson/Louise Quelch – (Trees) – Well done ladies you looked fabulous and were excellent! Their dialogue was clear with great projection and diction. Singing was exemplary with some exquisite harmonies.

Chris Thomas – (Nikko) - As the leader of the flying monkeys' this young man was superb. With no dialogue it is imperative to create a character the audience can relate to from the outset. This he did most skilfully; he was visually animated and his body positioning was first rate

Adult Ensemble – The adult chorus applied themselves to their varied roles with vivacious exuberance and it was clear they were having just the best time. They had been given some good direction in creating individual characters and this came over markedly. Their movement was uniform with plenty of life and vigour and their singing was super with some strong voices coming through creating great harmonies

Children's Ensemble - The children's chorus were a pure delight. They danced sang and acted their hearts out.

Matthew Smith – (Director) – assisted by **Kazia Grainger** - This is a young man that certainly knows his craft. The whole had been exceedingly well directed with some great touches interwoven into the performance; the transference of the ruby slippers, the poppy field, lion fainting and the melting of the witch to name but a few! He had a cast that were clearly capable of taking direction and he made the most of this giving them clear defined characters. As previously stated this is an extremely well written script and he managed to bring out all the humour and pathos therein. The show was well staged with excellent blocking and no upstaging which ensured a well-balanced stage at all times. Entrances and exits by principals and chorus had been well contrived ensuring continuous action. He created a fresh original and entertaining piece of theatre with great pace and dynamics.

Jon Brooks – (Musical Director) – This young man brought out the best in both principals and chorus; ensuring they had good dynamics impeccable diction confident entries and superb timing. He controlled the band with expertise accompanying the actors sympathetically, and balance between pit and stage was excellent.

Denise Schult – (Choreographer) – I really enjoyed all the routines created for this production; they were fresh and bright and each one perfect for the number. I think one of the things I admire most about this choreographer is her ability to ensure the cast enjoy what they are doing and convey this to the audience. My favourite routine by far was the intricate armography in the Munchkin sequence; it was so tight with every performer in perfect time.

Susan Richardson – (Production Coordinator) – This young lady had obviously done her job! Everything came together perfectly on stage and off; making for a first rate performance.

Kim Hollamby – (Lighting Designer) – There were so many striking moments throughout this performance but I have to mention in particular lighting for the cyclone, the rainbow effect in Oz the spot on the ruby slippers but my absolute favourite was the outstanding lighting for the snow

effect. The colours used for other scenes greens for the Emerald City reds for the castle were all wonderfully atmospheric and enhanced the action fabulously. There was a good use of smoke effect which used at the right time compounding the visuals of the cyclone and the melting witch. All this had been skilfully programmed and operated by **Adrian Croton** and there was an excellent use of spotlight expertly operated by **Louis Martin**

John Simmonds – (Stage Manager) **Becca Simons** (DSM) **Nick Humby** (ASM) & **Crew** – This team really had their work cut out they were so busy; but everything they did they did expertly and efficiently. They kept the action flowing and the pace moving. The scene change from Kansas to Oz was especially effective.

Dan Bryan – (Hexagon sound Board) – assisted by **Sally Ollerenshaw** - This was my second visit to this venue when I have been able to praise the sound. Personal mics and stage mics were superb with all the cast being heard effortlessly. I was impressed that there were no missed cues which is something that can happen to even the best technician. I so enjoyed the echo effect during Lion's "King of the Forest"

Brian Bretney – (Sound Effects) – These had been extremely well sourced and all appropriate for their use. The little chicks and the cyclone were just a couple of many that stood out.

Kazia Grant/Matthew Smith – (Props/Set) – Personal props were just right from scrolls to pikes. Larger props table throne incubator hourglass were all most effective and worked perfectly. The curtain hiding the Wizard was a little shabby and dull in comparison to the surroundings and Toto's lead was very modern.

Set Hire – Scenery Solutions – The drapes were well painted and looked just right for the scenes in which they were used. I particularly liked the forest. The farm house and door to Oz by **Russell & Graham Smith** looked well-built and sturdy; the society is lucky to have such skilled craftsmen. I liked the window in the door to Oz which was used to great effect. Both had been painted in colours that enhanced the surroundings.

James Humby – (Balloon Basket/Melting Witch) – These two effects were super. How lucky to be able to fly the balloon it really was impressive! The melting witch was so effective it really did look as though she melted and disappeared into nothingness.

Amanda Bretney – (Wardrobe Designer) – **Emma Reeves** – (Supervisor) – Were these two ladies really responsible for all the costumes? If so I really do commend them. The Munchkins' costumes were fabulous bright and fresh adding a splash of colour to the stage. The trees were super they looked rather like a Gainsborough painting. The Emerald City costumes were fantastic complete with headdresses and the principals' costumes were absolutely perfect for their roles.

Kerry Thomas – (Makeup Design) & **Team** – Character makeup was superb with a heavy base on which to put the lines that added the traits that made each character identifiable with the role. General makeup had been well applied looking fresh and sparkly.

Catherine Hannan – (Hair & Wigs) – Hairstyles were of the period; Dorothy's plaits aunt Em's bun and the Munchkins. I'm thinking the Winkies wigs were recycled from the Hot Mikado however they were perfect.

John Jones – (Front of House Manager) & Team – The front of house team were clearly visible making themselves known to the audience. Once again I would like to thank John and Ann for their hospitality and in looking after me and keeping me entertained.

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13