



Society : Stage One Youth
Production : The Wizard of Oz
Date : 9th September 2011
Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidenhead
Report by : Steve Bold, NODA Representative, District 14

Report

What a super trip down the yellow brick road this turned out to be. Sporting a multi-talented cast, each member on stage faced up to the challenge and thus the production was well received by the packed house. Stage One Youth's production of *The Wizard of Oz* had much to commend it. Having seen the film and show countless times I feel I know it by heart, so it was interesting when additional topical dialogue was added. It's sometimes difficult to describe this as 'youth' theatre, with so many accomplished performers, but age is not a barrier to professionalism only attitude is. With a cast of youngsters ranging from the very young under 10s to the odd 21 year old, this was very much an all-round cast. Having seen Stage One Youth's previous production last year, it was interesting to see how the performers had grown over the past year.

Dorothy Gale, Beth Cawte

A confident performer right from the off, Beth took on the extensive role of Dorothy with a smile, a frown and a look of despair and joy. She brought a vibrant emotional young girl alive to the stage, showing her colours as she stands up to Miss Gulch and strives to instill some 'backbone' in her fellow travelers. A pleasant voice complimented by music, although I felt she could have pushed herself just a little more on the big notes. A great performance nonetheless.

Toto, Ruby

Informed as we were prior to curtain up that this was a different Toto to that advertised in the programme, Ruby did a marvelous job of maintaining her concentration and following Dorothy as best she could. Only on a couple of occasions was she slightly distracted, but this was covered by both Dorothy and the other members of the cast responsible for Ruby's movements.

Aunt Em/Emily Gale, Keren Hollands

Bookending the performance, there is not a lot of time to build a character as Aunt Em, but Keren was feisty and emotional as the prospect of Toto being taken away became real. Also as the twister hit with Dorothy lost outside, she had to be dragged into the storm shelter for her own safety. A smaller but well played part.

Uncle Henry/Henry Gale, Niven Willett

A partnership with Aunt Em, but more a back seat to her more emotional portrayal, Uncle Henry finally let loose at the farmhands as the situation eventually got the better of him. I felt he was always holding himself back, knowing that an outburst of what he really wanted to say especially to Miss Gulch would only cause more issue. Again, a smaller role, but well done.

Miss Almira Gultch (Wicked Witch of the West), Cat Roberts

Distinct in her delivery, deliberate in her mannerisms, Cat brought both these roles to life with gusto. Miss Gulch was reserved but full of venom, it was clear there was a desire to enforce her wishes on everyone no matter what they thought of her. As the Wicked Witch of the West, Cat flourished with such abandon, I had to remind myself it was still the same actress. The cackling and overblown mannerisms, screaming and shouting at everyone and anything, she threw herself fully into the character. Here is a young actress that although she is just starting out shows ability and depth to each of her characterizations. An excellent performance, the clear stand out of the show.

Zeke/Farmhand (Cowardly Lion), Zac Abbott

Demure is not a word I would normally use to describe a young man, but Zac's performance was underplayed at first, not so much that he blended into the background, but more to give an indication of what was to come. His bravado when Dorothy expresses her dismay at Miss Gulch's proposal is excellently opposed to his eventual capitulation and timidity when the opportunity to display his bravery finally comes. In his portrayal as the lion, there is a somewhat strict

confinement to the scope of the role, but Zac did well with his own interpretation and made sure he was memorable with the delivery and little asides. The comedy element coming very much to the fore.

Hickory/Farmhand (Tin Man), Tom Kemp

Forced is the wrong word to use again when describing someone who is confined in their movements by an outside force, but he was a character role that is prevented from letting himself go by the constraints of his tin man physicality. Tom brought a good deal of emotion to his Tinman. A man without a heart that he did well to make us care for. Robotic in his movement, stoic in his delivery and good performance made better by the burgeoning relationship between the ensemble three and Dorothy as the show progressed.

Hunk/Farmhand (Scarecrow), Daniel Embleton

Physical comedy is one of the hardest things to pull off without looking like you are forcing yourself or performing fake falls, but Daniel has a natural fluid movement that allows him to play the Scarecrow with a good deal of motion that doesn't play into the realms of farce. The scarecrow is the most important part of the ensemble three as he is the audience's link to the story, the one who first meets Dorothy and I've always felt allows us to come along on the journey. His vocals and delivery were excellent and he took the comedy aspect of the role on without making it pantomime-esque.

Prof Chester Marvel/Wizard of Oz, Jared Barkla

A typical mid-west charlatan character on his first entrance, using Dorothy's gullibility to play on her heartstrings and send on her way back home. A good degree of the absent minded professor in his portrayal as well, before moving onto being the Wizard in the second act when his illusions and façade fall away revealing the timid man he really is. A good confident performance against much more outlandish roles allowed him to stand out.

Glinda (Good Witch of the North), Amelia Wall

A visually stunning performance from Amelia as Glinda, the spectacularly ball gown and roller skates added a good degree of mystery to the role. On Glinda's first entrance to the stage I had to look again as she glided across just to check she wasn't on a hover board. Amelia played Glinda as quite angelic, a dulcet voice with soft undertones, a very fairy godmother-y touch across the board. Not a large role in the grand scheme, but well played and she dealt very well with the roller skates.

Farmhands, Kirstie Bradbrook-Amit, Courtney Fleming, Tilly Mitchell

Smaller roles within the opening scenes, but everyone played their part with good interpretation and didn't let their characters drop even as they exited the stage.

Guards, Phoebe Andersen-Cox, Jacob Flynn & Citizens of Munchkinland – Mayor, Barrister, Coroner, Lullaby League, Lollipop Guild, Munchkins

The many more minor roles within the show, the odd line or two here and there is often the most difficult to deliver as you haven't been given the time to gauge the audience, but all of these young characters were excellent and didn't overuse their appearance, discreet and to the point within the scope of the performance.

Crows, Trees, Poppies, Snowflakes, Citizens of Emerald City, Winkies (Guards of the Wicked Witch) Nikko (Commander of the Monkeys), Jitterbugs, Flying Monkeys

Isabel Adams, Keira Ash, Sophie Barrett-Pouleau, Kirstie Bradbrooke-Amit, Nick Davie, Courtney Fleming, Lola Harris, Rose Harris, Issy Harris-Evans, Matthew Higgins, Natasha Hill, Bryony Hollands, Ellen Ives, Sam Lewis, Sam MacGregor, Tilly Mitchell, Elisha Paris, Ronni Quinby, Emily-Jane Shaw, Kyle Watson, Ella Whitaker, Lorna Young

Such a wide chorus, it must have been hard to keep everyone occupied, but these are professional youngsters who are involved because they want to be. A well dressed chorus and the minor parts all playing their bit on a bright set the show went along at a good pace. These were accomplished young performers who will do well as they learn and grow into bigger and more challenging roles. There were a couple of glances towards the audience as they stood at the front of the stage, but this is only a minor observation.

Brian Cox, Andy Nicholson and Adam Callaway, Sound and Lighting

Sound and lighting are two things that I hate to mention, so I am happy to say that here I don't have to. The art of good sound and lighting is that which you don't notice. That which takes place purely in the scope of the show and not as

an additional star alongside. The lighting was complimentary and well used at all times and the sound didn't overlay the action on stage.

Val Harrison, Nikki Cooke, Jean Gulrajani, Sarah Barkla Isabelle Foley, Debbie Mann, Nikki Lewis, Margaret Jones and Mair Jones, Make Up and Costumes

I cannot go without mentioning Cat Roberts as the Wicked Witch, her make up was outstanding and she is a brave girl to be willing to wear it for longer than I am sure she hoped. Throughout the show, the changes of costume and make up were prompt and cohesive, they matched with the flow of the show and continuity of the plot.

Graham Barker, David Kemp and Ursula Embleton, Musical Direction and Choreography

The Jitterbug, the Flying Monkeys, the movement of the Ensemble three, the general cast numbers, all of the choreography was rhythmic and flowing utilizing the physicality of the young cast to good effect and even a back flip or two thrown!

A complimentary orchestra that doesn't overshadow the performers especially the soloists is always a high commodity. There were a couple of occasions when there were lines lost at the beginning or ending of songs possibly due to timing or early/late cues, but this was a sterling performance from a large orchestra playing some very enjoyable and foot tapping pieces.

Maggie Kearney, Peter Rumble, Laura-Anne Putterford and Crew, Production – Stage and Set

A good stage crew is one that you never see or least that you don't pay attention to. There were a number of scene changes here, some behind black curtains as a front of stage scene took place, others on the main stage as the lights were down. The crew were professional, they were quick at the end of each scene, they set the stage and departed without fuss or acknowledgement. They didn't ever pay attention to the audience ensuring we didn't pay any attention to them. The set itself was relatively simple in its appearance but that is not a bad thing. More that they were easily movable from the wings to the stage and back, sometimes even being moved during a scene such as the tornado. This was a well drilled crew ably led by Maggie, Peter and Laura-Anne.

Ursula Embleton, Director

There are some directors who feel that they are not involved in the accolades that a group should receive for a well performed and constructed show. I, for one, feel that the director is our guide within theatre, they have been tasked with the responsibility of interpreting the show for us to view. Ursula has provided for us another production of such talent and diverse characterizations that we must remind ourselves that the majority of these performers are under 21!

The singing in the whole show was superlative, but I must mention once again those few occasions when some performers didn't quite push themselves as far as they could have done.

The costumes as mentioned were excellent, I especially liked the doorman of Oz, the Wicked Witch of the West and Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, who all stood out amongst the other members of a well dressed cast.

The Principals were all well cast with each one complimenting their fellow performers, although there are some parts bigger and more involved than others, this was a team effort from start to finish.

Finally, we must remind ourselves, this is a youth group and as such they will always be losing performers to university and other experiences, so the ability to bring through new members and constantly keep existing members moving on up through the amateur theatre experience is highly commendable. An enjoyable performance from a theatre group that many others, especially youth groups, would do well to pay attention to.