

## **Shrek, CAODS - Chelmsford Civic Theatre**

### **TheatreLife**

Tonight was the first amateur performance of this musical I had the pleasure to see and it was a top-class evening's entertainment. From the very start we were set up for a great adventure ahead with a fantastic set from Scenic Projects and I particularly liked the sliding trees as a way of keeping the action going.

Playing the iconic role of Shrek was Mitchell Lathbury, this was such a strong representation of the Shrek character that we know and love from the animation and the later stage musical. Clearly Mitchell's stature added to the characterisation, but his vocals were on point and he gave us pathos and dynamism all evening.

Alongside him as Donkey was Nathan Gray. Nathan embody the Eddie Murphy persona we identify with Donkey and his physical portrayal was so full of energy and sharp comic timing, my only comment was on occasions it was difficult to understand what he was saying due to the speed of his dialogue.

The adult Fiona, Joanne Quinney gave us all the complications of the character with great facial expressions, some fantastic comedic moments and a superb voice meaning she truly delivered all the aspects of this complex character, in fact some of her quick changes between daytime Fiona and Ogre Fiona were astonishing and I was blown away by the professionalism I saw in undertaking those.

The belching and wind sequence between Shrek and Fiona was a particular moment that the audience just loved.

In fact, there are so many ways to praise the show and I have to mention the beautiful costumes and fantastic make up. This show is about the spectacle and so many of the characters had prosthetics and complicated costumes that just finished off the production. I also imagine many of these were extremely hot to work in so well done to all those hot and sweaty actors inside. In addition, the technical side was also exemplary with everything from a 15' Dragon, amazing transformations, some great lighting states and so many scene changes.

David Everest-Ring as Lord Farquaad was not only hysterically funny to watch with what I can only imagine were incredibly bruised and sore knees and there was only one occasion when I saw one of his real feet sticking out of the side of the cloak, otherwise the magic was so well maintained and he knows just how to play it to get the audience laughing with him as well as at him. Such a big performance for such a small man!

Keeley Denman as the Dragon was every bit a sexy temptress, it was unfortunate tonight that her microphone failed but despite this, her performance was still outstanding, vocally on par with anything I have heard and still able to deliver over the orchestra. Well Done to Keeley.

Kieran Bacon as Pinocchio was extremely convincing as the wooden boy who would be real right down to his extending nose and he had some strong vocals. In addition, there were a number of other outstanding characterisations; the Wicked Witch; the Three (German) Pigs, the tranny Wolf and and huge kudos to Natasha Palmer both as the Sugar Plum Fairy and Gingy. Her vocals were excellent, and she really brought her characters to life.

It is a shame there wasn't more company work in the show, but this is down to the script and not the production team, which means its not really ideal as a company amateur production.

The creative direction by Chris Cuming was of a very high standard with every little detail making it just perfect and the orchestra under the baton of Claire Penfold also delivered the punch required for this upbeat musical. However, on a few occasions it did sound a little loud but otherwise spot-on.

The only other negative comments I can make, which stop this show being absolute perfection, are in relation to some of the distracting work and noisy ad-libbing going on by some of the fairytale characters in the aisles; like the three blind mice which was just too much and stopped us seeing & hearing what was actually going on, on stage - it was far too distracting and unnecessary in my opinion as it added nothing to the production.

Given the overall standard of the whole production I don't feel there was a weak point across all the casting and some amazing vocals which meant all in all, this was a superb show and delivered everything you could possibly hope for in a modern musical. It certainly lived up to all expectations of a West End show and I challenge any other amateur society to put on such a strong production across the board. Huge congratulations to everyone involved and I'm delighted to hear that the houses for the remaining performances are full. I imagine most audience members left the show tonight saying 'I'm a Believer'.