NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD

FULLLENGTH FESTIVAL 2024-2025.

Group: Latchingdon Arts & Drama society

Venue: The Tractor Shed

Production: Bleak Expectations

Director: Tony Kavanagh & Michelle Kuta

Date: 21st. May 20205

Introduction

This quirky take on the works of Charles Dickens was initially a radio production characterised by quick exchanges of dialogue, a cast of characters with 'pantomime-styled names,' and an impressive array of sound effects! The stage play presents the group with the opportunity for actors to take on more then one role. It also requires very tight timing on the physical action of the play combined with the work of the stage crew. Developing a stylised approach for the characters to present a unified 'look' for the play is also important. It will be interesting to see how the group meets these challenges.

Front of House Alana Wilson, Mandi Tickner, LADS members

I was warmly greeted by the FOH team, there were plenty of them on hand to assist the audience. Well done.

Refreshments John and Brenda Strange

The audience is always well catered for at the Tractor Shed and the team were kept busy before the show and during the interval. Well done.

Poster/Programme Michelle Kuta

This was nicely designed with good use of the19th C gentlemen image on the front and I loved the playful use of the moustache and top hat motif**.**

It was nice to see the tribute to Peter Jones included, he made such a contribution to the group, sadly missed. Nicely done.

Socials/Publicity Alana Wilson, Michelle Kuta

Clearly successful almost full house on first night! Well done.

Set design &Set décor Lisa Kavanagh, Martin Gunfield, Faye Wharton, Moir Gunfield

The set design showed a clear vision that was well executed. There was some intriguing detail such as the effective window downstage right allowing hands and objects to come through. The 3 entrance points meant the stage crew and actors could move freely around each other, so important to help sustain the pace of the action. The 'linen closet,' discreetly hidden behind the bookcase worked particularly well allowing Agnes to emerge flamboyantly upstage centre. A very successful design. Very well done.

Set Construction Martin Gunfield, Charlie Potter

This was well done with clear definition of the upper and lower parts of the walls, the upper being painted in peppermint green while the lower sections were painted to give the impression of wooden panelling. The set was appropriately dressed with many pictures and the pendulum clock. Furniture at the upstage wall was minimal to allow easy access for actors and stge crew. Movable scenery pieces, the salt mine cut outs, gravestones, graveyard walls, pews, lectern, desk, tea table, two sofas, the font, the lamp post, the church, courtroom, prison cell, looked good.Very well done.

Back Stage Manager Martin Gunfield

Martin ran a very well rehearsed team.

Back Stage Crew Evie Gunfield, Buster Tickner, Avril, Faye Wharton, Josh Yates

Brilliant! They definitely deserved more recognition at the end in the curtain call for such strong teamwork under Martin's guidance. They become a character in this production and the audience enjoyed their appearance as much as seeing the characters. They are woven into the action of the play and played their part impressively. Excellent.

Props Moir Gunfield, Kathy Lang

There was great work here some of which overlaps into personal props that are part of costumes,such as walking sticks or canes. Some props such as Pippa's anvil, the gravestones and the salt mine scenery,were made by the team. There was also a formidable list of object to be collected many of which had to look period-appropriate.

It was a diverse list too, everything from books, letters, to various signs to indicate a change of location, food items (for humans and swans!) and the more unusual such as a large flattened hand, a cannon, and a stick of dynamite.

Moir and Kathy should be congratulated not only fulfilling the list but lso in the management of the props ensuring that they appeared at the right time. Very well done.

Sound Caron Moor, Alex Garnham

Caron and Alex were kept busy with background sounds and sound effects that highlighted or supported the action. Like the props there was a diverse list of effects required, some of the more regular ones- church bells horse and carriage some very specific ones- dog barking in a graveyard, 'cracking and squelching' of Benevolent's head being crushed and the sounds of swans!

All cues were precisely executed. Very well done.

Lights Alex Garnham, Richard Lang

The basis of the lighting design largely moved between a spotlight on Sir Philip in his chair (as narrator) which was dimmed slightly as brighter lights were brought up on the 'memory sequences.' Cues in the first act were accurately delivered but in the second act a couple seemed to come in a bit late. The sudden blackout worked well as did the atmospheric lighting for Flors Dies ealy with its pink hues,the lightning introducing St. Bastard's and the more atmospheric lighting for the church. Well done.

Costumes Sharyn Hughes, Kathy Lang

The costume requirements for this play read almost like that of a pantomime with many changes of costume for the cast. Period costumes were needed for the Bin familyin paticular and there was some clever imporvising for the scoolboy outfits and the generic London street folk.

A numbeer of special outfits were needed for the judge, the vicar, the reverend and Harlan J. Trashcan. Agnes also needed a selection of costumes as she appeared in her differing outfits as a jester, a workman and cat. Ripkey's outfit needed carful attention to detail so her animal features could be discarded once her bag was removed, Her dress also needed a pouch for her letters. Sharyn and Kathy should be commended for their management of this exttensive wardrobe. Very well done.

Book Doreen Neall

With such a quick-moving script having Doreen must have been a great asset during rehearsals. Her services were not need during this performance.

CAST

Sir Philip Bin Alan Bellchambers

Alan used a confiding tone to the audience to draw them into his story, his presence on the stage throughout allowed him to deliver his narration from his chair. He gave every appearance of being an elderly gentleman, with a slight stoop, who became more animated as he warmed to his storytelling. A nicely measured performance. Well done.

Lily Bin Pat Trudgett

An essential non-speaking role that helped to introduce the physical comedy of the production and set up the action for what was to follow. Well done.

Agnes Bin Moir Gunfield

Moir gave us a very spirited performance as Agnes presenting herself in many guises as her grief descend into madness.. She literally threw herself into the different versions of Agnes – the jester a workman, a piece of linen and a cat. Her appearances appeared to the audience to be randomly dropped into the action and were very diverting. It certainly tested the costume team! Very well done.

Thomas Bin Phil Flack

This character needed to present with good posture, his upright body language worked well The mannerisms of holding his lapels, and the constant refrain of 'I'm fine, 'as he tripped on every exit added to the comedy. Like Agnes his appearances were intermittent but were well done and added to this surreal story.

Pip Bin Heather Banbridge

This was a bright and engaging performance from Heather. She has a good clear voice and confidently took her central position in the action. As the leading character Heather was on stage continuously, her interactions with Harry were particularly good, they caught the laddish tone of young male friends struggling with the 19th. Century ideas of manliness well. This was a strong characterisation warmly appreciated by the audience. Excellent.

Pippa Bin Chloe Cooch

Chloe gave us a great portrayal of a bright and energetic woman trapped in 19th C beliefs and traditions all too literally represented with the anvil carrying! Her confident delivery to the audienceAs one of the leading characters in the story every appearance involved the anvil-carrying, which finally got put to good use. This was a strong characterisation. Very well done.

Poppy Bin Trudy Carr

Flora Dies-Early

Both of Trudy's characters die early which seems unfair! Physically, Trudy was right for these roles, her slight build and fair colouring made her the archetypal Victorian heroine. She played the roles well, Vocally she was a little quiet, especially when speaking upstage. Overall an effective performance.

Skinflint Parsimonious Buster Tickner

The open body language used by Buster emphasised the generous nature of this character. His breezy manner was expressed through his light tones as he presented an optimisitc view of the world. He is more of a narrative device in this play rather than a fully rounded character, the main purpose is to serve as a contrast to Benevolent.Given this Buster did not stint on his characterisation and gave agood portrayal of Parsimonious. Well done.

Gently Benevolent Charlie Potter

Charlie really embraced his inner villain and clearly enjoyed playing his different 'characters.' He adopted an imposing stage presence for Benevolent and the villainous laugh ending in a coughing fit which deflated his air of evil authority was well sustained. As Benevolent's alter-ego, Harlan J Trashcan Charlie used gangly and slightly un-coordinated body language which was very funny. The voice he used for for Trashcan was so swallowed' it was barely intelligible (perhaps deliberately so?) The audience really enjoyed this characterisation. Very well done.

Bakewell Havertwitch Chris Plampin

Like many of the characters in this piece Bakewell also had another disguise as Monsiuer Boulange Bin (with lamp post). The character was distinguished by having a ready supply of baked goods to offer people, despite trying to be a kind and generous character Chris's first appearance as Bakewell was spooky and effective. An enjoyable performance. Well done.

Headmaster Wackwell Hardthrasher Terry Saunders

Reverend Praygood Hardthrasher

Terry had the chance to explore both of these unpleasant characters and he managed to do this successfully by changing his body language, for Wackwell there was much strutting and cane waving whereas Praygood demonstrated more 'closed' gestures and his superior manner towards Pip which fell apart nicely when he realised he had been outwitted were effectively portrayed. Well done.

Harry Biscuit Elle Munday

I really enjoyed this characterisation, Elle presented us with a jovial ,eager friend, wanting to help but not sure how. There were many funny interactions with Pip, especially over 'hugs' and whether or not this was 'manly' behaviour. She has a very expressive face and

adopted a lovely, slightly bewildered air for the character. A delightful performance. Very well done.

Broadly Fecund Luke Hounson

Judge Solomon Hardthrasher

These were nicely contrasting roles –the judge was in keeping with the tradition of the reverend and schoolmaster, loud and blustering with a touch of 'Gilbert & Sullivan' stereotype about his taking on the role of the jury with quick changes of hat.

Fecund is a villain of a different nature the selfish man keeping his daughter at home to look after him and pretending she is ugly. To differentiate Luke used different voices and body language with fecund presenting himself as a quieter personality. Well done.

Ripley Fecund Michelle Kuta

Having believed her father in believing she was ugly, Michelle's presentation of the joy of being found beautiful and avidly expressing love was very touching. Her clumsy attempts to physically engage with Pip were very amusing.Although a relatively short appearance Michelle gave a very enetertaining perforrmance, well done.

Introduction

Miss Chastity Hardthrasher Sharyn Hughes

Sharyn delivered the FOH announcements wearing a stylish period outfit, this went on to be nicely combined with the opening of the play, It was neatly done.

I enjoyed Sharyn's portrayal of Chastity, stiff-backed, and tightly-closed gestures were accompanied by her harsh tones and suitably outraged reactions to any suggestion of impropriety. This made her all the more comical. It was a sincere portrayal and all the more effective for that. Well done.

Vicar Clive Russell

This was a lovely cameo role nicely performed, his high moral tone reflected in his square-shouldered stance with a notable change of tone on, 'I'll just nip out...'. As he avoids the unpleasantness of Pip and Trashcan's encounter. A fleeting but essential appearance. Well done.

Extras Pam Burton, Phil Flack, Pat Trudgett, Chris Plampin, Sharyn Hughes, Clive Russell

This team of 'background artists' provided great support in the 'crowd 'scenes adding lots of context, interest and colour.

Very well done.

Directors Tony Kavanagh & Michelle Kuta

There is much to praise about this production.

Considerable demands were made on the backstage teams which rose to the challenge admirably. Their support and disciplined approach to their tasks meant the show ran smoothly.

As directors it was clear that you and the actors had worked to a vision of the way these characters moved and spoke. Dialogue was delivered clearly and confidently with the formal, clipped tones of the 10th. Century society.

The moves and stage business had all been tightly rehearsed alongside the stage crew to achieve a cohesive show.

The charatcers in this piece are stereotypes with no real depth to them, so as directors you have to allow your actors to bting something individual to their charatcerisations. This was largely successful and resulted in some very entertaining performances. You had also worked hard on developing a sense of 19th Century behaviour and mannerisms in the cast,

The pace in the first half was good but in the second half it felt a little slow, especially in the trial scene which could have been cut down.

The audience certainly enjoyed the show and were listening carefully throughout.

Thank you for your hospitality and the opportunity to see the production,

Best wishes

Maggi Fisher

NETG Adjudicator