

MR CINDERS • JUNE 2008 • HAMPTON HILL PLAYHOUSE

Review

Mr Cinders is not merely a role reversal of the traditional panto story but a sound musical in its own right. Whilst at first, Mr Cinders may seem twee and dated and yes it is but that also is its charm. BROS made a really good fist of this endearing piece and not only were the principals strong but sub principals made their mark too with some genuinely quirky characterisations.

I am always surprised why Mr Cinders is not done more often by amateur musical societies, especially societies who perform more than one show a year. It tends to make perennial long lists but seldom actually gets selected. It compares favourably with similar shows of the era and the genre, such as; The Boyfriend, Salad Days and Free as Air. It has a vast assortment of characters as BROS so demonstrably proved as well as having plenty of business and 'nice frock' opportunities for the ensemble. You feel as though you know the music although you don't and yet it has a great song as a hook in 'Spread a Little Happiness'. I think people get put off by the title, thinking it to be a re-make of Cinderella with a fellow in the leading role. Essentially it is, with the cruel step-brothers and a ball, however I doubt anyone would notice the similarity if they didn't know the show's title. As you can tell I am a fan of the show having played Jim some ten years ago (in my slimmer days).

The set was very pleasing on the eye had just the right amount of scenery and props to be interesting but not to clutter and slow down changes from scene to scene. I particularly like the tasteful use of pillars and plants to show there was money around the place. I think for me the most pleasing aspect of this BROS production was the feel good factor. It had it in spades. This was a cast who really worked as a team and whilst the main principals usually get the accolades, for me this was a true ensemble piece with each individual portraying their own character and making a wonderful job of it. Some of the ensemble were relatively new to the stage and their lack of stagecraft showed at times and there were moments of awkwardness but because of the nature of the piece, it seemed to work. I think much of this positive atmosphere must be a tribute in particular to your Director, Clare Henderson Roe but also your choreographer Edz Barrett. The vision was there, the direction was there and with the skills of the cast, BROS produced another winner! I don't think any society produces these 'mid size' musical productions any better than BROS.

Technically, the show was extremely sound. Your Lighting plot worked well to brighten and invigorate the predominantly outdoor feel. I felt the lovely Band under Musical Director Janet Simpson could have done with a boost. I know many of your patrons wouldn't have liked louder music but I felt it needed another 10% to give it that wow factor. All the costumes worked a treat and looked very much in keeping with the time.

There are too many named principals to comment on individually and this was a true ensemble production but I have written a few notes on some of the lead principals who all had challenging parts, in programme order;

Lumley Lancaster - Lawrence Keal - Lawrence was suitably smug and pompous as the vile Lumley. He revelled in his bullying of Jim

Phyllis Patterson - Louise Turnbull - I've mentioned Louise from the couples if you like because she found a gem of a 'ok yah' character and carried it through beautifully

Guy Lancaster - Simon Willis - A relative newcomer who seemed to slip into the gentry rather easily. Simon did remind me of the odd prince or earl who turns up on telly and seems to be somewhat distant.

Sir George - Charles Halford - We felt for Charles as he rankled with the brothers whilst trying to give Jim a fair chance. Again the pomposity was much in evidence but in a refined way.

Lady Agatha - Mandy Stenhouse - Lady Agatha is a nice part to play - the battleaxe role. Mandy had her work cut out trying to keep everyone under her control.

Jim Lancaster - Jonathan Simmons - Jonathan has boyish good looks and a rather inexperienced feel about him which makes him ideal for this role. He coped admirably with those awful puns and the ridiculously difficult 'On the Amazon' song.

Henry Kemp - Chris Warden - Chris was suitably loud and in your face as you would expect from an American character. This was a good portrayal of a part which can be a bit one dimensional.

Smith - Perry Kitchen - A small but pivotal role from Perry, proving that it usually is the butler who did it.

Jill Kemp - Kerry Magee - Kerry is very engaging on stage and this was a role that really suited her. Kerry has a pleasant singing voice and moves very well.

Minerva Kemp - Kerry Sampson - Another strong portrayal - Kerry vamped her way through as the cousin and seemed to be enjoying every minute

PC Merks - Wesley Henderson Roe - This was a little gem of a cameo. It came out of the blue for me and was so crazy that in amongst the total madness it really worked. Well done.

Donna Lucia - Lynne Shirley - This is by know means an easy part to play. Lynne did very well, to have to wait until half way through Act 2 for your entrance and then you have a large quantity of dialogue which you must lead and Jim merely follows, is to say the least tough.

I must congratulate the entire and ensemble and creative team as this was a show that I was very glad I got the chance to see - well done to you all!

Steve MacVicar