

This was my first visit to this group and to this venue and I was impressed that they had arranged for my wife and I to be greeted by the Lord Mayor of Leeds. Well, actually, by sheer coincidence, we arrived at the same time but what was impressive was that the Right Worshipful lady (and three local councillors too) had given up their time to support amateur theatre in this way. In the current economic climate those of us involved in amateur theatre can hardly expect much in the way of financial support from a local authority and so personal involvement such as this is all the more welcome. We were also introduced to the Players' President, Edward Turner, proudly sporting his NODA 60-year medal, a couple who had been involved in re-forming the group some years ago and the current Chair, also the author of this excellent script, Linda Birch. It's a story which does not show the role of Lord Mayor in too good a light and so I wondered whether Linda realised that she would be sitting next to Leeds's current incumbent when she wrote it.

Here the story begins when we are introduced to Walter (Woody the woodsman), the only human involved, as it turns out. He seems to be feeling rather sorry for himself when he is visited by Mary, the contrary fairy who transports him to Rainbow's End, a town full of just about all the fairy tale and nursery rhyme characters you could wish for. Genevieve Shaw made a fine job of her part as Woody whilst Elle Barraclough was a particularly graceful fairy with a confident and pleasant singing voice in her opening number ("Once upon a blue sky"). It's not long before we meet Boy Blue, the character who invites us to respond to his every entrance, this time with a request for him to blow his horn. Angie Cordingley showed all the enthusiasm you would want in her confident performance. Red Riding Hood herself was well played by Katie Jones, a lovely, suitably demure young lady, whose visit to her roller-skating Grandma is, of course, central to the plot. Emma Greenwood as Granny, also known as Old Mother Hubbard, was suitably dotty and we were pleased that she escaped from the wolf's clutches in the end. Between the generations was Dame Hood, Red's mother, a baker of some repute, having apparently displayed her talents on a certain TV show. James Creegan extracted all the fun from this character and quickly established an amusing rapport with the audience.

Astute readers will have noted that a character so far missing from my report is that of the Big Bad Wolf. He it is who, in spite of some reservations about his past, seems to have been elected to high office (where have I heard of that before?), in his case that of Lord Mayor. His exploits, besides the usual Grandma impersonation, included the stealing of Mootilda, Farmer MacDonald's pride and joy, of Bo-Peep's sheep, bringing a suitably distraught performance from Lindsay Leng, and the destruction of the houses of two of the three little pigs. Albert Wheatley, Freya Everson and Sam Edwards made a charming little trio with an excellent rendition of "Who's afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf", oozing confidence way beyond their years. Joe Smith played the Wolf with appropriate villainy but also found time to act as Assistant Musical Director. Rose Smith assisted him on stage with many a feline move as the Cat (the one with the fiddle).

The fairly large cast of all ages (the youngest only six, I understand) are all characters you recall from those stories of your childhood. Some may not have had many lines but we knew who they were from their costume or behaviour. Jack (Liam Edwards) was particularly accident-prone and Jill (Ruby Heward) and others soon became a little tired of the aroma from his vinegar-and-brown-paper bandage. There was a Gingerbread Man, Goldilocks and a family of bears, Rapunzel, even the dish and spoon who ran away together and others too numerous to name. Miss Muffet (Holly Smith) became less afraid of her spider as she became aware that this was the less frightening of the species, Incey-Wincey and she and Tina Edwards as the latter made a good job of their duet ("Friends"). Four excellent dancers gave further support in some lively numbers and the whole show had a good variety of musical items. I particularly enjoyed the old songs ("Let's face the Music and Dance", "Good Morning"/"Anything Goes"), the latter providing an opportunity for some tap-dancing to start the second act. We even had a visit from a Claudia look-alike in an attempt to identify the traitor. The whole thing had been well put together by Dean Patrick and the result was a very enjoyable and entertaining production, which moved along well, also thanks to good work by the backstage crew. Lighting changes and effects were excellent, whilst sound was also of a high standard.

With only four performances, there are fewer opportunities to see the group in action than is the case with some others but they seem to be well-supported (and so they should be!). Long may they continue.

Review from NODA rep. February 2025