



Society : Starmaker Youth Theatre Company
Production : Aladdin Jr & The Little Mermaid Jr
Date : Friday 9th March 2018
Venue : South Hill Park Arts Centre - Bracknell
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

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I was delighted to be asked to review this double bill; I believe this was a first for both productions in this area. Both shows had been well cast and enthusiastically and energetically performed by the youngsters.

THE LITTLE MERMAID Jr

Jodie White – (Ariel) – This young lady was quite delightful; her performance was honest and dynamic. Her gestures when she had lost her voice were expressive and meaningful enhancing her character perfectly. She had a super singing voice and “Part of your World” was poignant and thoughtful.

Shreya Bharati – (Carlotta) – As headmistress and Ariel’s ally this young actress gave a sterling performance. She had good visuals and her dialogue was audible clear and well enunciated. She worked extremely well with Ariel and the other actors in the scenes in which she was involved.

Harley Emmitt – (Chef Louis) – I would have liked this young man to have been a little more flamboyant! He has all the necessary skills to have created an over the top character. His comic timing is brilliant and he engages well with the audience. His singing more than suited “Les Poissons” which he put over confidently and in character

Bianca Burduja – (Flotsam)

Alessandro Porcelli – (Jetsam) – This pair was an absolute joy! Their dialogue was superb with some fabulously elongated sounds. I so liked their fluid undulating movement which they made look so easy; though I’m sure it took a lot of rehearsal to perfect.

Matilda Lawrence – (Flounder) – I liked this young actress’ portrayal of Ariel’s best friend; she was warm and sincere with excellent facial expressions and clear well projected dialogue. She worked well with Ariel covering up for her to her counterparts. Her part in “She’s in Love” was first rate strong and tuneful

Johnny Coombes – (Grimsby) – This young man was great; he made the role his own. He brought out the humour of the character with audible well delivered dialogue. The way he ran around after Prince Eric trying to advise him was great fun and his rendition of “The Contest” was nicely sung

Liam Campion – (King Triton) – As King of the sea this young man gave a strong performance with powerful dialogue befitting the character. His bearing was upright and regal and he moved with an easy adroitness. I liked the way he changed his persona when he tenderly changed Ariel into a human and sent her up to the land to be with Prince Eric.

Katie Upton – (Pilot) – This young lady gave a brilliant performance with excellent vocals. She had natural movement which was apparent in her number “Fathoms Below” which was superlatively sung

Alex Hutson – (Prince Eric) – As the adventurous prince this young man carried himself with proud and noble demeanour. His dialogue was engaging and charismatic as was his relationship with Ariel. A well sung “One Step Closer”

Fergus Wood-Blagrove – (Scuttle) – As the seagull expert in all things human this young man gave a good account of himself. His dialogue on the whole was clear and well delivered however there were a couple of occasions when he dropped his voice at the end of a sentence making it difficult to distinguish what he said. This is something to work on for the future. “Human Stuff” was put over in character.

Kamran Seal – (Seahorse) – This was a nicely delineated characterisation and the timbre of the vocals was absolutely perfect for a court herald

Winnie Coombes – (Sebastian) – What a tour de force this young lady was! She was vivacious and animated with the most delightful facial expressions. She moved exceptionally well being lithe and agile. The use of a West Indies accent enhanced the humour of the character greatly at the same time because of the accent some of the dialogue became garbled and inarticulate. All in all this was super performance and one of the funniest scenes was when she followed Ariel on shore and into Chef Louis’ kitchen. She has a fine singing voice and her lead in “Under the Sea” and “Kiss the Girl” was vigorous and exciting.

Elsie Wood-Blagrove – (Ursula) – This was a standout performance! This young actress was assured bold and dominant with consummate dialogue. She looked fabulous and moved with a robust masterly gait. She was deliciously evil and I so liked her villainous laugh very wicked witch. “Poor Unfortunate Souls” was the highlight of the evening

Hayley Crofts/Mia Jackson/Aimee Lewis/Lucy Woolford – (Gulls) – This quartet acquitted themselves admirably. They supported Scuttle with great aplomb and sang their part in “Human Stuff” remarkably well

Molly Barnett/Jenna Conneely/Haley Crofts/Hannah Day/Millie Johnson/Megan Jones – (Mersisters) – These six young ladies were fantastic! They worked as a team and bounced off one another famously. Their voices blended brilliantly and their harmonies were amazing especially in “Daughters of Triton”

Ensemble – Throughout the piece this ensemble worked their socks off; they were animated enthusiastic and exuberant. Their singing was of the highest quality and their movement lively and spirited. I particularly enjoyed “Fathoms Below” and of course “Under the Sea”

ALADDIN Jr

Corey Abery – (Aladdin) – As the hero of the piece this young man gave a good all round performance with expressive dialogue and animated facial expressions. He had a super relationship with Jasmine and interacted well with the other actors around him. His movement was superb and this really shone throughout “One Step Ahead”. His highlight was “A Whole New World” which was brilliantly sung.

Katie Weller – (Genie) – This young lady was an absolute joy; she brought the stage to life every time she made an entrance. She is a natural comic actor and her timing was impeccable. The inflection she managed to get into her dialogue was unbelievable and this enhanced the humour greatly. She put over “Friend Like Me” with spirit and sparkle.

Francesca Waters – (Iago) – Oh how I enjoyed this young lady’s performance! She was bubbly perky and lively with dialogue that positively bounced along. Her slightly awkward stance and movement were endearing and captivating and the way she kept leaping on Jafar was delightfully comical. She had created an exceptional relationship with Jafar and together they had some of the best scenes in the show. “Why Me” was great fun and sung with true conviction.

Seth Macleod – (Jafar) – This young man was absolutely typical of the Disney villain and had the character off to a T! His dialogue was suitably fiendish and he delivered it with strength and power. His rapport with Iago was spot on and his cruel treatment of Aladdin and all other lesser beings was right on the money. “Why Me” as stated above was quite brilliant and he sang his part with gusto befitting the character. His reprise of “Prince Ali” was expertly delivered rousing and highly charged.

Robyn Warrick-Clarke – (Jasmine) – This young lady captured the essence of the character perfectly being feisty gutsy and self-willed whilst maintaining a sweet naïve nature. Visually she was vital and vivacious and her dialogue spirited and expressive. I liked the rapport she created with Aladdin and the way she reacted to her father and Jafar. She had a lovely singing voice which suited her all her numbers especially her part in “Arabian Nights” and “A Whole New World”

Evie Stonehouse/Millie Cook/Loeey Whitlam/Jessica Hilton-Owen/Evie Cripps – (Narrators) – This group of youngsters were great; they played their parts with verve and sparkle. I liked the way they moved round the stage in the first scene acting as reporters; a very clever idea! Their voices blended well and they sang as one which is quite an achievement

Ronan Cundy – (Razoul) – This young man was fabulous; he was funny full of vitality and moved around the stage at a monstrous pace which really added to his inept portrayal. Dialogue visuals and movement were all first rate and this culminated in an excellent performance.

Harley Emmitt – (Sultan) – Portraying an older figure is always challenging for a youngster; however it did not faze this young man at all. He managed to capture the father figure

perfectly and his dialogue was delivered with depth of feeling which conveyed a caring persona.

Ensemble – The ensemble in this piece delivered on all levels. Their movement and singing could not be faulted and they supported the principals with great dexterity.

Vanessa Hine – (Director) – This director had worked hard to create good characterisations and pleasing relationships between the actors. The overall performances of both shows was most effective with great care having been taken with staging grouping and fluidity of action. She had instilled great confidence in the children encouraging them to perform with conviction intensity and passion. I would like to point out at this time that it is also the director's responsibility to curb over enthusiastic performers to ensure they do not upstage mask or hinder any of the other actors. Working with a minimalistic set gobos and video projections meant a good deal of artistic licence was used and a lot of imagination on the audience's part. However this did not detract from the overall enjoyment and entertainment of the piece.

Matthew Harcourt – (Musical Director) – I am in awe of this young man; he gets so much out of these young singers ensuring they are confident with entries pitch and timing. In these two performances there were some exquisite harmonies and the voices he had selected blended brilliantly. He had clearly spent time with principals and chorus as vocals were sublime.

Amy King – (Choreographer) – assisted by **Amelia Dorey** – This is the first time I have seen anything choreographed by this young lady and I have to say I was most impressed. Her ideas were fresh and novel. She designed her diverse routines to fit the action perfectly; there was particularly good use of armography being flowing and fluid in Mermaid and sharp and angular in Aladdin. The cast had been well drilled so that all the routines were performed with ease with the youngsters smiling throughout and clearly revelling in every move.

Alistair McKay – (Stage Manager) – ASM - **Keith Baker/Lesley Pearson DSM** – **Michelle Palin** This SM ran a tight ship and assisted by his team he kept the action flowing admirably. They had their work cut out when manoeuvring the flying carpet which was worth the effort as it really was most effective.

Rebecca Simons – (Lighting Design) – This was a most effective plot making use of full lighting and atmospheric touches when under the sea and in Ursula's lair. The use of the star curtain and follow spot for the flying carpet was ingenious and the gobos added greatly to the overall effect.

Louis Martin – (Lighting Programmer/Operator) – With so many cues and the use of a good many projections this technician operated the board flawlessly. The two spotlight operators - **Stuart Brookfield/Louis Martin** could not be faulted and they used the spots with an exact precision that was most commendable.

Matthew Harcourt – (Projection/Set Design) – This young man must have spent hours trawling through clips until he found the ones that portrayed the scenes and fitted the action. They did help to convey the scenes without having a lot of cumbersome scenery. Having chosen what scenes would be played on a projection it was then fairly easy for him to design a set that would work around this. What he did was create a minimalistic two dimensional set

with a rostrum at the back which maximised the acting area and gave another depth for the director to work with.

Tom Horrox – (Sound Design/Operator) – There was times when the sound was so loud it distorted the voices and then unfortunately it was so low you were unable to hear what was being said. I'm sure this would have been rectified for the remainder of the run.

Starmaker costume hire - These costumes were superb! The ones for Little Mermaid were ideal for the underwater creatures and I particularly liked the jelly fish quite brilliant. I'm sure the heeleys was the idea of the director; however it worked perfectly for the mermaids giving the impression of movement without walking. The Arabian costumes were suitably authentic bright and colourful. I especially liked Iago's parrot costume. In both shows the chorus had been kitted out to complement the principals and fit the plots ideally.

Rhi O'Keefe/Jess Costello/Katie Costello – (Properties) – All props were appropriate to the action; I so liked the ship's wheel cleverly depicting the whole. All other props from the trident and swords to the lamp scroll and staff were all spot on.

Jo Stringer/Jess Longhurst – (Hair & Make-up Designer/Supervisor) – Make up had been well applied and was consistent for all the actors. The villains had suitably heavy lines and there was some nice glittery eye makeup. Wigs were excellent and so right to capture the Disney characters. My only criticism would be the beards that the King and the Sultan wore. There was rather too much of them and in the case of the King rather impeded his dialogue. I liked Ursula's unkempt mop which suited her immensely.

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13