

Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood
Performed by Crediton Operatic and Dramatic Society (CODS)
On Monday 22nd December at 7pm
At The Old Town Hall, Searle Street, Crediton.
Directed by Lyndsey Betts
Choreographed by Holly Harris

Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood is described by the 'first time director', Lyndsey Betts as "a mashup of heroisms, hilarity and heart" and certainly was this in buckets.

I sadly missed the first two songs having arrived for a 7.30pm performance instead of the start time of 7pm so my sincere apologies to the company and Alan-a-Dale and Dame Winnie Widebottom especially, as I missed their solo numbers. I am sure they would have been enjoyable as both the actors performed well throughout the rest of the production but I will mention more later.

This was a lively, family-friendly pantomime that delivered all the traditional elements the Crediton audiences expected. It was a well written script with plenty of humour, colour, and festive fun from throwing sweets and providing mats at the front so children could watch with an uninterrupted view. However, some parents should understand that the performers are concentrating and perhaps toddlers or very young children should be dissuaded from wandering around front of stage, which was the case when I attended. This is merely an observation and not in any way a criticism of this production. It did not spoil my enjoyment. The cast did well and were not distracted, producing a pantomime full of energy, drawing the audience straight into the adventure of Sherwood Forest.

The whole company worked brilliantly together, with strong comic timing and confident performances throughout. The Dame was a standout, as always, and Mike Cannings performed the role with great aplomb. I loved his increasingly colourful wigs and costumes throughout and his coloured DM's. I also especially enjoyed the teaching scene with Dame Widebottom (great name) dressed in a yellow wig and yellow coloured dress trying to deal with the antics of the disguised Sheriff and Dennis. His nightdress and red dressing gown received a few wolf-whistles from the audience too.

Holly Harris as the nasty Sheriff of Nottingham and her side-kick Dennis, played by Harry Stuart, were superb together. The Sheriff, dressed in colourful leather trousers and bodice, white laced shirt, red cape with purple lining, purple boots and a sheriff's black hat with purple plumage, looked the part and sang '*Bad*' with power. Her comic timing provided real laugh-out-loud moments and excellent audience interaction, deliciously over-the-top, earning enthusiastic boos. Dennis, her foolish side-kick was very watchable with clear diction and an ability to gain the audiences sympathy as he gets battered by his employer. A showstopping moment with these two was when the Sheriff '*chained*' to the set clearly managed to *break* one of the manacles having to pretend to still be immobile. The audience roared as she ad-libbed "I've broken the set, thank goodness it's the last show"!

Robin Hood, performed by Tasha Currie was suitably heroic and charismatic with a Nottingham accent (good touch). Disguised as Rory McTavish during the archery competition (Ac 1 Sc6) and dressed in a tartan hat with ginger wig, tartan skirt and glasses, she pulled off a brilliantly funny Scottish accent. Katt Davies-Young as Maid Marion had a charming stage presence and brought calm and serenity to her scenes. Her duet with Robin '*Rewrite the Stars*' was delightful and she sang with confidence throughout.

Robin's merry men were Little Joan (Charlotte Ireland), Tuck (Gracie Pearn) and Alana-A-Dale (Sadie Morgan) were confident actors and all enjoyable to watch. Their interaction with the audience as they handed out polystyrene rocks to throw at the stage to free Marian was very funny as stray rocks hit most of the actors on stage. Little Joan and Tuck sang '*The Boy Done Nothing*' melodiously and were so funny when disguised as Soapy Sue and Peggy Plunger.

The Babes were Tilly, played by Matilda Davies and Tommy by Toby Knightley. Two young actors who brought warmth and charm that balanced the comedy nicely. They both acted with great confidence, sure of their lines and sang well. Both of them, equally, had super stage presence and comic timing for such young actors.

The show was packed with catchy songs, well-choreographed routines, and vibrant costumes that keep younger audience members fully engaged. The script was full of panto favourites; witty one-liners, topical local jokes, and a good amount of audience interaction with plenty of "he's behind you!" moments which were all delivered at a fast pace and kept the story moving. The use of the score from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, as Robin and the Sheriff fought, added humour too.

The painted backdrops, especially the forest scene was colourful and glittery which contrasted well with the dungeon flats and door. The door, which kept crushing anyone stood behind, was a great physical gag, as were the arrows that were poked through the back of the huge archery target as Dame Widebottom is fired at. Both the adult and junior ensemble of which the Bows performed when I attended, danced, sang, and performed with a good deal of energy and supported the leads well.

Overall, *Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood* was a thoroughly entertaining pantomime, perfect for families and with many laugh-out-loud moments. This is a directorial debut for Lyndsey Betts and what an excellent job she has done. The production flowed well and was nicely choreographed by Holly Harris too. The space on stage is limited as is access but CODS always manage to make it work well. This production was a joyful celebration of a classic panto tradition by this talented company and the audience left smiling, laughing, and ready to celebrate Christmas.

My congratulations to everyone involved.

Lyn Burgoyne – Noda Representative for South West District 5 (Mid and East Devon).