

Welcome back Bramley Parish Players. After a 2 year enforced lockdown BCP returned to a new venue at Leeds West Academy. The problem when stepping up from a church hall to a fully equipped theatre with a large stage is that everything has to be bigger, brighter and better, and Bramley certainly delivered on all three of those. But with Dean Patrick as Director, that was never really in doubt. Dean and his team gave us an absolute belter of a pantomime. What a way to celebrate their (slightly belated) centenary.

Sleeping Beauty is a strange pantomime, in that all the action takes place in Act 1 ; then Act 2, the Prince kisses and wakes the Princess and they all live happily ever after. So, inevitably Act 2 is a lot of padding – that’s no reflection on Bramley that’s just the way this pantomime is.

There was an incredibly strong cast made up of Bramley stalwarts and a few new faces, all of which helped bring a little sparkle to a cold February afternoon.

The comedy was in the capable hands of Nanny Nora (James Creegan) and Muddles, the jester (Joe Smith). James is a wonderful traditional Dame, who had the audience eating out of his hands, even on a Saturday matinee – his comic timing and sense of irreverence was everything you would want from a Dame. (I’ll see you later for my “slice” – you had to be there) I’ve seen Joe develop over the last few years from a young naive performer to the confident comedian he is today, despite the terrible jokes.

The love interest in the pantomime was Princess Beauty (Ysanne Morrill) and Prince Anton (Emma Whitehead) – they both delivered the traditional Principal Girl and Boy roles to perfection. Ysanne is an experienced musical theatre actress who can sing, dance and act – a true triple threat. AND, she never stopped smiling – I suspect she was even smiling during her 100 years sleep? And Emma was a perfect pairing with Ysanne – she looked and acted just as you would want a hero to. She too had a great singing voice that blended well with Ysanne in their duets. The mainstay of any pantomime is the battle of good versus evil – in this case, the Wicked Fairy Carabosse (Emma Greenwood) and Good Fairy Stardust (Lindsay Leng). Emma commanded the stage whenever she appeared and elicited all the right responses from the capacity audience. She looked and sounded evil and certainly scared me. Lindsay was the complete opposite, and the perfect pairing with Emma – she sparkled, both literally and figuratively, and, of course, she won the day. There was an added bonus of two other good fairies – Fairy Mary (Holly Smith) and Fairy Berry (Yasmine Stevenson). Holly, like her brother Joe has developed into an extremely confident actress ; whilst, Yasmine, the “stroppy” fairy had a great sense of comedy and warmth.

There was excellent support from the rest of the principals – Queen Holly (Nicky Knightley), King Philip (Billy Connolly lookalike Moss Ambrose), Royal Gardener

(Sue Law), Lady-in-Waiting (Tracy Crowther and the Royal Announcer (Sam Harris). It might have been an idea to actually give them names – it was quite a mouthful when they were addressed with their titles.

And, of course, I have to mention the DRAGON!! Every time I see one of Dean's pantomimes, he always produces something so unexpected and stunning that creates that WOW moment. This time it was a massive dragon. Brilliant.

The entire company were well drilled both vocally and movement wise, thanks to the skills of the vocal coach (Sean Gleeson) and Choreographers (Andrew Lockwood and Dean Patrick). There was a great choice of music ranging from musical theatre classics through to S Club 7, all performed with precision, energy and a smile.

Of course, all the performances on stage would have come to nothing without the people behind the scenes. It must have been a challenge to everybody to upscale to this venue. So, massive congratulations to CS Lighting (sound & lighting & Tom Waters), Costume (Ruth Ritchie and her team), Props (Tracy Crowther, Sue Law & Emma Smith), Makeup (Geneve Smith & Linda Birch) and the entire team responsible for the set and scenery. All of this under the masterful control of the Stage Manager, Trevor Smith.

Once again, many congratulations to Dean on creating and directing a fun packed sparkling pantomime, full of colour and laughter – now, isn't that what we all need at the moment? Thank you for inviting me and I hope your Centenary Dinner goes well. I'm just sorry I can't be there.

Brian Craven NODA area representative