

WHARFEDALE FESTIVAL OF THEATRE 2008-2009:
WRITTEN ASSESSMENT

Musical: *Alice in Wonderland*

Entrant: **Ilkley Amateur Operatic Society (Junior Section)**

Performance seen: 07.11.2009 **Venue:** King's Hall, Ilkley

1. Stage Presentation

This heading includes stage setting, props, lighting, sound, costumes and make-up.

This show presents a real challenge to Set and Costume designers, but the result was a triumph both of originality and of very hard work in both departments. A dais at the back with a slide from it to the stage enabled Alice to slide down it into the rabbit warren. The warren was represented by a series of hoops (roofed with material) through which Alice pursued the White Rabbit as he sang "*I'm late! I'm late, for a very important date!*" The basic set with its dais was sufficiently flexible to form the backdrop for all the remaining scenes - the courtroom, the garden, etc.

There were three Alices - Small Alice, Tall Alice, and Real Alice, who in a split second changed places with one another, unseen by the audience. This was done by means of a clever lighting effect that momentarily blinded us while the changeovers took place. Well done to whoever thought of this.

The Caterpillar's head was a suitably black-and-green-costumed adult, and behind him as his body and tail came a group of children in descending order of height following along with green Hop balls and singing "*Zip-a-de-doo-dah*". There were three Cheshire Cats in ginger costumes that sat on the dais. The Dodo Bird, the March Hare, the Mad Hatter and the Dormouse were all beautifully costumed to fit the characters they were playing, and we had a very effective teapot! In the Queen of Hearts' garden there were children dressed as rose bushes, whose white blooms were being painted red by children dressed as playing-card gardeners. And of course we had the Queen of Hearts, the King of Hearts, and the thieving Knave of Hearts.

Make-up was very good.- again, a lot of work had gone into this because of the number of different creatures and flowers that had to be represented on stage. Props were appropriate, imaginative, and well used.

Sound was excellent - well balanced and easy to listen to. I heard every word of the dialogue and the singing, and I'm sure everyone else did. This is no mean achievement by Ilkley Amateur Operatic Society, as the acoustics in the King's Hall are very difficult indeed. Your Sound designers have had to work very hard and position microphones and speakers very carefully to make sure everyone in the audience can hear wherever they happen to be sitting, and you've cured the problems. Well done!

2. Production

This heading includes interpretation of the spirit and meaning of the play, teamwork, general pace and variation in tempo, grouping and movement, making of points, and sense of climax. It is also under this heading that an assessor takes account of the greater difficulty involved in tackling a production with a large cast.

Alice in Wonderland was a good choice for your company. This is a book that holds a special place in the hearts of most people, and Walt Disney did not let us down when he turned it into a film. Many of the songs were familiar to the audience - "*The Unbirthday Song*", "*I'm late! I'm late!*", and "*Zip-a-de-doo-dah*", to name just three. The vast majority of the cast were young people - just four were adults (the King of Hearts, the Queen of Hearts, the "head" of the Caterpillar, and the Dodo Bird), there to act as mentors to their younger colleagues: this balance worked well. All the remaining members of the cast were young people, who sang with great confidence, zest, infectious enthusiasm, and an obvious love of performing. The parts were well cast with people who knew how to dance, how to act, and how to sing in tune and be heard without forcing their voices.

The choreography was original and the dancers were well drilled. I particularly liked the sequence at the start when the White Rabbit and then Alice had to run through the dancers without clashing with anyone. This was very skilfully worked out and was carried through efficiently: all the dancers involved were exactly where they should be at the time when they should be there, and there were no collisions. This is not at all easy to do on such a severely raked and relatively small stage, especially when there are a lot of people on it.

3. Acting

This heading includes characterisation, audibility of speech, variation in tone, appropriateness of emphasis, gesture and movement.

<u>Alice:</u>	On stage throughout - a very good, sound performance and a nice singing voice.
<u>Small Alice:</u>	Excellent performance and good stage presence from a very young actress - very well done.
<u>Tall Alice:</u>	A good performance but you had less time on stage to make your presence felt. Well done, though.
<u>White Rabbit:</u>	You were NEVER "late"! This was a very professional and polished performance - great talent and without doubt a star in the making.
<u>Cheshire Cat 1:</u>)
<u>Cheshire Cat 2:</u>) Very effective performances.
<u>Cheshire Cat 3:</u>)
<u>Mad Hatter:</u>	You performed the <i>Unbirthday</i> " song extremely well and you, too, have a lot of talent. One to watch for the future.

<u>March Hare:</u>	As usual with you, a very poised, professional performance.
<u>Tweedle Dum:</u>) A good comedy duo who worked well together and
<u>Tweedle Dee:</u>) were extremely funny. Well done.
<u>Caterpillar:</u>	A good performance from all parts of the Caterpillar!
<u>Dodo Bird:</u>	A good performance.
<u>Queen of Hearts:</u>	Delightfully nasty - do you ever get to play anyone nice?!
<u>King of Hearts:</u>	As usual with you, a very competent and steady performance and a very good singing voice.
<u>Mathilda:</u>	A good, steady performance: you tied the story together well.
<u>Doorknob:</u>	A small part but well played.
<u>Knave of Hearts:</u>	Again, a small part but well played.
<u>Dormouse:</u>	Nicely sleepy - well done.
<u>Flowers:</u>) Slick and professional. Well done.
<u>Creatures:</u>)

4. Theatrical Attainment

This heading covers the general impression made by the performance as a whole, the type of play chosen, its dramatic merit, the suitability of the cast, the originality and effort shown in the performance and the standard achieved.

This was a show that reached a very high standard indeed. I enjoyed it enormously and so did the rest of the audience. There was an impressive amount of young acting talent on show, and the young people's obvious enthusiasm for performing was infectious. I'm sure I'm not the only one who left humming the tunes from the show!

This production was very well thought out and directed, the music and choreography were very good, and the work of the design team was quite outstanding. Many congratulations!

18.11.2009

(Bernard Riley)