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A good team effort

Pantomimes are all about gathering local talent together and entertaining the local community – and an all age one usually. Your director and writer did a good job of garnering all of that talent and weaving them into a story, albeit a little contrived. With such a range of ages it is always difficult to strike the balance between humour (most often directed at the adults in the audience) and action (that appeals to the little ones). There were moments when this worked really well and others where I felt that the one-liners were coming too rapidly and muddying the waters of the storyline. Consequently there were some little people who got distracted.

Of course, it doesn't help if the writer is also directing and performing. For me, it loses the objectivity that an independent director can bring. When the scenes got a little too protracted, I felt that a non-performing director might have cut them down (or even out) and this would have helped the overall shape of the production. There were a few times when I lost the links that connected some of the scenes to the main storyline and this might also have been ironed out with someone who was looking at the show from an audience perspective. That said, there were some humorous moments and engaging ensemble numbers that lifted the show and punctuated with some real energy.

Staging

You had a nice set that I see you had hired. The woodland scenes and the bears' cottage worked particularly well. Perhaps you might have made a clearer distinction in the circus tent scenes with some contrasting lighting. Your opening scene was rather confused (unless you had written it, of course) and I wasn't aware of who the characters were until much later in the show. Indeed, I'm not entirely convinced that the fortune-teller aspect of the story was necessary. Once we got the first ensemble number, things picked up and we were entertained with good costumes and some confident singing.

There were a few moments when the changing scenes collided; for example I didn't really understand why Gilbert and the ensemble with their combat clothes appeared in the cottage scene when Goldilocks was asleep. Eventually I understood that Gilbert was staying with the bears, but I guess many in the audience missed that. Perhaps you could have used the flats to better effect in those moments.

At the start of Act 2, I was surprised to see the beach scene and wondered whether it was really necessary, when the rest of the story was in the woods. However, it was an opportunity for your younger dancers to perform. In the Second Act, the Elvis Presley tribute worked well, despite its disconnection to the plot and the children coming on stage with their golden tickets was a nice touch. I am not convinced the 'reversing' necklace was worth it for all the effort required in setting it up at the beginning, but the Finale was well constructed and happily meant that the second half was not quite as long as the first half (Nearly two hours for the first act seemed too long and many children were getting restless).

Costumes were lovely and there were some great changes of scene where a new entrance of the ensemble created a real wow factor. The black and white scene at the end of Act 1 was really good, as was the ghost train scene costumes (although I'm not sure whether that scene was necessary). I know how much hard work goes into this aspect of a show so well done to the team responsible for costumes.

Lighting

The woodland scenes were nicely lit and worked well when the stage was full of performers. I would have liked a stronger contrast in the cottage and also in the circus tent, when warmer colours would have provided a more dramatic effect. Indeed, for pantomime, excessive use of colour is perfectly permitted and allows a lighting designer to experiment with effects that are not likely to be used in other shows during the year. I felt that you could have done more in this regard.

Sound

The band was well balanced and I liked the position in the pit. On the whole the vocals were heard above the band, but from time to time the sound was consumed by the instrumentalists and performers were not heard. I think that this was partly because this was your first performance and I am sure that you addressed this as the show ran during the week. Of course, it is difficult with inexperienced performers to know how well their voices will project and no amount of sound support will compensate for a badly projected voice. Sound operation was good for a first show and I'm sure it got tighter as the run progressed.

Choreography

Well done for getting your young performers dancing in sync and confidently moving across the stage. There were a few times when the little ones were rather hidden behind taller dancers and this was a shame. And I think that your ensemble would have coped with some more challenging choreography and this would have given your audience a chance to see their talents more fully.

Goldilocks

I think your nerves got the better of you in the first half and we were straining to hear your tiny voice, over and above all the action on stage. However, this did settle down as the show developed. I was also longing for someone to have set your songs in a higher key; they were far too low for your voice and this compromised your ability to project your vocals. That said, you looked the part and I liked your innocent portrayal of the role. Your scene with the porridge and the beds in the Bears' cottage was your best.

Gilbert

You had confident strides across the stage and we believed in your character from the outset. I liked the slow delivery of your spoken words and this was perfect for the pantomime genre. You have a lovely voice and it was well projected so we could hear every word. Again, I would have lifted the key of your song ('Suddenly' in particular was very low for your register). Just be careful you are not singing upstage. In a small performing space like this, it really makes a difference when you lift your head and sing right out to the back of the theatre.

Lenny Scoop

You made a strong, energetic entrance and I liked the bright intonation in your voice. You had the classic fool's role in this show and that was made good and clear from the outset. Well done for attempting to involve the audience. I'm not sure the entire house was comfortable with your 'poo-themed' shout-out, but on the whole this worked for each of your entrances. You had a good command of the stage and you made the role physical which was perfect for this genre. Your diction was sharp and well-rounded.

Perhaps an aspect of your role might have been a stronger relationship with Goldilocks; we missed that opportunity for a romantic, unrequited love element to the show and this would have given you the opportunity to engage with your audience and gain sympathy. You had some rather confused scenes (the one with the gorilla comes to mind) where I felt you looked awkward but this

might have been more about direction than your performance. At these times, I felt that you had lost your important connection with the younger members of your audience. You had a much more successful second act, when you started to really enjoy your time on stage and this was infectious.

Whipcrack

You had just the right stance for the evil villain and I think you might have been helped with more menacing lighting for your entries. I liked your deep voice and arrogant swagger. Occasionally we lost the impact of your character in the story, particularly when you were standing still on stage (the Old MacDonald Farm scene is a case in point) watching the comedic antics of Splat and Tumble. I would have had you off stage then. The knife throwing scene worked well and was suitably menacing. You have a good singing voice, but I wasn't convinced that Queen number was necessary at the end of Act 1.

Fortune Teller (and other characters)

I think you had a tricky time of it in this show. You had a number of roles to play and if I'm honest I'm not sure all of them were really necessary. Well done for rising to the challenge of all these characters; they got better as the show developed and we realised that you were one and the same character. For me, the fairy and the lion worked best. Your voice was warm and deep and this worked well for you, especially when so much else was going on on stage. And your strong facial expressions were entertaining.

Mummy Bear

The panto started for me when you made your first entrance and I thoroughly enjoyed your performance throughout. This was a perfect role for you and you were clearly comfortable in it. I liked the pace of your delivery, your facial expressions towards the audience that made us feel entirely involved in your storyline. The duet with daddy bear was really strong and your relationship with him was both funny and endearing. And I loved your costume changes!

Daddy Bear

I liked your casual and considered lumbering movements across stage (very bear-like) and your confident repartee with Mummy Bear. Your duet with Mummy Bear in Act 2 Scene 2 was a highlight of the show. Clever lyrics helped you both, but this was a well delivered number and everyone enjoyed it. You were having fun with the rest of the Bear Family and this was a positive element of the show.

Baby Bear

I enjoyed your juvenile bouncing around the stage and I heard every word even when you were moving around so well done for that. Your voice had good light and shade and you connected directly with the audience on enough occasions that they felt an empathy with you. You also engaged with every scene, even if you were not at the centre of the action.

Splat and Tumble

You were both clearly enjoying yourselves on stage and were confident performers. I had an issue with the speed with which your one-liners were coming in the script, albeit they were cleverly written. It's fine when you are familiar with the script, but not so easy when you are hearing them for the first time. They were coming thick and fast and, for the most part, were being missed by your audience. The effect of that is you leave your audience behind and they are just watching you two having a great time, rather than feeling involved in the humour.

Your farm scene was a funny moment in the show and I really felt that your audience were fully engaged with your antics. I'm not sure what Whipcrack was doing on stage at that point, but this was a well directed scene and the best one of the show to that point. The Porridge Scene with the long arms went on too long and I sensed that the audience were getting restless. You might well have sharpened that up as the week progressed.

Again, in the scene with the bicycles, there was a moment when your audience became restless and I wondered whether this was becoming a little self indulgent. I do recognise the challenge of pleasing all of the people all of the time, but it's also important to keep the little ones with you because restless children mean stressed parents and so the tension in the auditorium mounts.

Action – packed show with all the elements

All in all this was a show that had moments of good entertainment and I could see all the work that had gone into putting it together. Lots of young performers had the opportunity to join in with the action on stage, dress up in some lovely costumes and enjoy the musical numbers, supported by a very capable band. If anything, it was a little too long, but it's pantomime so anything goes!

Thank you for your hospitality and I wish you every success in your future productions.