

PETER PAN TRANSPORTS PRUDHOE TO NEVERLAND!

In common with other comparable groups, Prudhoe's Dragon Tale Theatre Group had not presented a show since October/November 2019, so it was a tremendous pleasure to see the group back in action this year, when it presented Tom Whalley's pantomime Peter Pan at Highfield Middle School from Wednesday 26 to Saturday 29 October 2022.

The fact that all five performances were given to capacity audiences speaks volumes for the support which the community in Prudhoe and the surrounding area gives to this enterprise and a good many highly favourable comments found their way back to the group.

The pantomime itself was a typical entertainment of its kind, with a witty and clever script, which gave all onstage plenty to do, and all the ritual ingredients, including hero, villain, dame, damsel in distress and enough calls of it's behind you and oh yes it is, oh no it isn't, to satisfy the most seasoned audience member.

Looking now at individual performances, the principal 'boy', Peter Pan, was played by Fiona Henderson, whose experience in this type of role came over at every turn in a pleasant personality and thoroughly convincing manner. Also highly successful was Samantha Macbeth as Tinker Bell. Samantha proved highly adept at dealing with both the acting and singing which the role involved and charmed the audience throughout.

The dame, Lady Starkey, showed Lee Robinson in his first incarnation of this traditional pantomime role. He looked the part one hundred per cent and entered into it thoroughly in a very well sustained Scottish accent, eliciting plenty of laughs.

The chief baddy, Captain James Hook, was expertly realised by Ray Moore. He too is an experienced player but this was his first role as an out-and-out lead villain. He sustained the villainy extremely well and showed his great versatility. Joining him as his first mate and doubling as Lady Starkey's son was Smee, played by Louis Popov. Louis' comic timing and facial expressions were a joy to watch. He is an exceptionally talented young man and I look forward to seeing much more of him in the future.

The Darling family plays a prominent role in proceedings and Peter McKay and Caitlin Hughes-Davidson showed ability and wisdom beyond their years in the way in which they interpreted the parts of Mr and Mrs Darling. They were very ably assisted by Harry Clubbs, Fintan Ellender, Aaron Graves and Cate Wooton, who played other family members and assisted in the development of a genuine within-family rapport.

I must sincerely apologise to all cast members whom I haven't mentioned by name because of space considerations but there was not an indifferent performance amongst them. The acting, singing and dancing reached a very high standard indeed and I was struck by the fact that, without exception, everyone remembered to act all the time and not just when they had something specific to do. Note should be taken of several cast members who played more than one part, demonstrating their

skill in dealing with a range of work. Then there is the fact that I didn't pick up a single missed line or wrong musical note. What a wonderful effort by all concerned.

But I'm sure that those who went on stage would agree that many other people also helped to make a show a success. These included, in no particular order, those who carried out tasks relating to sound, lighting, make-up, wardrobe, set design, scenery/props, setting up and down the stage and hall as a whole, front of house, selling tickets, transport, catering, use of social media design and production of programmes, photography and videography, as well as jobs needed to comply with the law, such as registration and chaperoning. All who worked on these tasks did their jobs thoroughly and contributed in no small way to the overall success.

Dragon Tale is a member of the National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA) and it was entirely fitting that, on the Thursday evening, Regional Newcastle/Tyne Valley representative Michael Avery presented long service awards to a number of members. 10-year awards went to Aaron Graves, Allie Hughes, Samantha Macbeth, Ray Moore, Marianne Nesbitt and Keith Park. Those who received 15-year awards were Fiona Henderson and Sue Henderson. Awards for 20 years went to Stu Rutherford-Orrrock, Caroline Warburton and Ian Warburton.

In conclusion, it was a delight to see Dragon Tale in action again after the pandemic and I look forward eagerly to the group's next production.

Lucy Pye