

## **There's No Business Like Show Business.....**

Oh, how true that rings out especially if it was as enjoyable as the show I saw last week at Ferring Amateur Dramatic Society. (F.A.D.S.) It was an adaptation of Charles Dickens Christmas Carol by Simon Sutton.

A perfect, pre Christmas treat for all the family.

This production was a mammoth task for F.A.D.S. with a large cast including children, and numerous scene changes. The later handled very well.

What I want to know is, why, oh why, have the company never tackled a Christmas production before? Obviously their followers will now expect and look forward to Yule Tide entertainment on a large scale.

Charles Dickens wrote a real Christmas cracker. (Pun intended!) It has everything that makes a good story, strong characters; and a moral to take note of. 'Do unto others as you would be done unto yourself.'

The direction under Marshall Peach, aided by Yvonne Baker and Helen Chewter was well staged with imagination and creativity. The prologue and opening scene were delightful.

A young family was excited about the forthcoming festive activities and were listening to their mother reading them a Christmas story. This was set in front of a gauze through which we could spy the world of Dickensian London, looking from Scrooge's office window. About thirty years ago gauzes became 'old hat' as every theatrical company over used them. I am pleased to see their return, as they are so simple but create a pure magical effect.

Congratulations to the young children who opened the show, not an easy task. They were a joy to watch and listen to. Every word was crisp, clear and audible. Some seasoned actors could take note from them. My only constructive comment was perhaps a London accent could have been considered, as they spoke better than their parents. Still these young performers showed developing potential. Well done!

Ian Sheppard played Ebenezer Scrooge the miser. Ian looked as if he had stepped straight out of a Dickensian novel.... But not the one I was watching. His persona would have been perfect in The Pickwick Papers. This was of course a huge part and a big undertaking but I would have preferred a more miserly and grumpy performance from this supposedly cantankerous old sinner.

The make up gave him such beautiful red rosy cheeks that made him look quite endearing! Having said that the character then started to develop and settle as the scenes progressed. Later we saw some very touching moments from him.

The two charity ladies worked well together, Pat Attree and Sandi Smith. The song containing the names of Dickens characters who had contributed to the charity funds was one of the highlights of the show, which I wanted to hear again.

The scene with dancing at the party was charming and the young girls looked pretty in their period costumes.

The ghost of Jacob Marley played by Simon Vyvyan complete with heavy chains and suitable vocal sound was quite chilling.

The other ghosts, Past, Present and Future (particularly Christmas Past played by Linda Fryar, as she glided seamlessly across the stage) were very effective. The lighting was simple but well designed by Stuart Upperton. Especially the way the white wall was light to create an ethereal effect. I wondered if the ghosts had considered using more spectral qualities to their vocal tone?

The fight / freeze scene was well rehearsed.

The audience liked the mime by Mr. Fuzziwig, David Morgan. (Mime is a particular genre I love.) Although this was enjoyable to watch, I felt it could have been enhanced even further with crisper and clearer precession. Even so I was very pleased to see that this special art had been included.

The Family scene in Mr and Mrs Cratchit's house with Tiny Tim, (Believably played by Jacob Toms.) was well performed and directed on such a small stage. I would have liked there to be more greenery, such as holly and ivy, to add colour and life.

Unfortunately there are far to many characters to mention individually but I thought it was a strong cast, well rehearsed who all worked well together and pulled of a most enjoyable show.

The ending should have been on a positive high. It would have been lovely for carol singers to have been welcomed into the room or even come through the audience. It sadly fell a little flat with an expressionless group awaiting the audience to clap.

I must not forget the warm welcome that one has come to expect but must not take for granted, by the front of house team. All I felt was lacking was a mini mince pie to go with the welcome cup of tea on a cold winters evening...Food for thought for your next Christmas production?  
Congratulations to the programme designer this was very atmospheric and in keeping.

So thank you one and all for a most entertaining start to the Christmas season. Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy New Year full of more treats in store for your audiences.

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