

Region



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Society : Panda Players
Production : The Witches of Eastwick
Date : 9 March 2017
Venue : The Elgiva, Chesham
Report by : Judith Watsham

[Show](#)

Report

Thank you for inviting me to your production and to your President, Helen Turner, for her warm welcome and the drink.

This is a very complicated show to put on with a lot of scene changes, not to mention the flying sequences. Your Stage Manager, David Martin, and his assorted assistants, and both crews - stage and flying - are to be congratulated on the smooth and almost silent movement of scenery and props.

The hired-in set was most effective and worked well and I was interested to note that this was based on the original West End production which I saw many years ago, I certainly remembered some of the scenery.

Your Director and Choreographer, Amber Dye, had worked you all very hard resulting in some effective moments but I felt that some of the ensemble dances lacked verve and pace from one or two of the dancers. Please remember that the audience has a bad habit of noticing the few who do not smile, when all around them are, and, sometimes the same people, those who are not quite as sure of the movements and/or words as everyone else. *Dirty Laundry* was a case in point as far as the movements were concerned as not everyone on stage seemed to know what they were doing. Conversely, you displayed more confidence in *Dance with the Devil*.

Your Musical Director, Robert Wicks had also worked hard with you I know but again some of the chorus numbers were a bit ragged in parts for the above reason. Only seven of you in the band but the clarity of the singing was not helped by the fact that you were far too loud sometimes and drowned both soloists and ensemble. *Eastwick Knows* and *Dance with the Devil* were only two examples of this and I could hear very few of the words.

Andy Friedli's lighting was, as usual, excellent. Only one comment Andy – I think you used 'movers' on a front fly bar? These occasionally swept the audience and were very dazzling where I sat. Was this always necessary when all the cast were on stage?

The sound, Tess Ludlow and Christian Ashby, was effective – especially the timing of the thunder crashes. Of course, you had problems with the overloud band, particularly when underscoring drowned some dialogue, and it was a shame that not all the mikes worked well. The two children, Sam Dell and Alexia Hockey, were inaudible in the opening unfortunately due to mike failure.

Martiarts' programme was excellent and you should enter it into next year's NODA London Programme competition. Clear with a good layout and design.

Suzie Turner and Rachel Samborski produced props to Panda's usual high standards – although someone should have told Darryl that you cannot be seen ironing a shirt and walking away leaving the iron plate to burn a hole – unless, of course, such damage is required. I expected him to show us his burnt offering – but he didn't!

Helen Turner's costumes were excellent, especially those worn in the *Dance with the Devil* number and, most notably, the wide variety of wild and wonderful outfits in which Fidel appeared.

I have already mentioned the ensemble. You were all named characters and most of you stuck to your characters very well – we knew, for example, just who the worst gossips were! Just remember, all of you, to react all the time to what is happening around you even when you are not singing. Some of your exits were slow but, knowing the venue as I do, I suspect this was due to lack of space in the wings due to the need to store several very large pieces of scenery.

Barry Dell as Darryl van Horne, acted the part to the manner born! I liked the fact that you had foregone your usual blond hair and coloured it black which put you right in character. At all times, you responded just as the character demanded. You also sang well. This was a very good interpretation. Only one comment, and it is quite understandable. Both when you seduced the three witches and when you were lounging on the bed with them, your technique was far more advanced with Jane Smart – unsurprising this as I know she is your wife – but, having seen you seduce her first you then hardly touched the other two.

Now, to the three witches of the title. You harmonized well and were in character all the time.

Alexandra Spofford, was well portrayed by Joanne Day; I think that you had a problem with the follow spot once or twice which was a shame as your face is very expressive – when we can see it that is!

Jane Smart, Tracey Dell; Tracey you acted very well indeed.

Katie Nightingale as Sukie Rougemont was outstanding. The fact that you were trained at a theatre school, in this case I see it was Mountview, gave you both experience and a technical advantage, especially in your singing, which paid off big time.

All three of you flew well and looked as though you were enjoying it – hard to do I think when you are suspended several feet in the air! The audience could easily believe that you were really flying, partly due to the excellent flying gear but mainly due to the expressions on your faces.

The domineering Felicia Gabriel was played by Emily Culverhouse. Again, in character all the time and you sang well too. Slight sleight of hand problems when you dropped the ball too early but both you and your 'husband' covered it well.

James Moorcroft gave a very good impression of a philandering, albeit hen pecked Clive Gabriel.

Jennifer Gabriel, Sophie Rose Page, was very believable. Sophie, you acted and sang well.

Louis Kelly looked just right as the young Michael Spofford. You too acted and sang well and, Louis, I felt that you showed great promise for the future.

Fidel, Haydn Davis, was excellent. You had little to say but your appearances brought forth gales of laughter when the audience saw your progressively more outrageous costumes.

This, as I have said, was a very ambitious show for the Pandas and you provided a most entertaining evening.

Judith Watsham
Regional Rep NODA London 11A