

The Snow Queen: A Review

Another knockout performance from the Cumnor Players can only mean one thing: Christmas is well and truly underway! This year, we were treated to a wonderful interpretation of Hans Christian Andersen's suitably seasonal fairytale, *The Snow Queen* (perhaps more familiar to younger audiences as the inspiration behind *Frozen*), ably adapted by Cumnor's own Ian Bannerman. As ever, such a spectacular evening was enjoyed by all ages.

The talented set crew, led by the maestro that is David Klein, had worked their magic once again with a magnificent set. While a particular highlight was the Scandinavian forest in the second act – complete with silver birch trees suspended from the ceiling and a beautifully snowy backdrop – a gothic ice palace and a Danish village were no less impressive. The band ('*Sleighed*', in homage to one of Cumnor Players' longest-running gags), meanwhile, showcased their characteristic musical versatility, with perennial classics as diverse as *Ice Ice Baby*, *Royals* and *I've Had The Time Of My Life* soundtracking the evening (and tempting one or two audience members to join in!).

The pantomime begins with – who else? – Tim Pottle, in a Nordic get-up as the dame, Grandma (and indeed, occasionally as her identical triplet), treating us to a rendition of the appropriately reworked *I'm So Thorny* as she trims her rose-bushes (Bud, Petal & Rose, wonderfully played by Chloe Tappin, Freya Briggs-Duchesne and Liza Zhyhadlo). In such an enviable role, Tim shows off once again his impeccable comic timing and grasp of double entendre. Grandma's capable assistant, Sven the gardener (played with gusto by Charlie Stockford), is always on hand to deliver tools or witty one-liners. The lovestruck central coupling, meanwhile, Gerda and Kay, played with aplomb by panto regulars Grace Corti and Mo Harry, both show in spades the charisma needed to anchor the show.

Special mention, however, must go to Paul Bobby, who stepped in last-minute to cover for an unwell cast member and donned a horned helmet to play the rampaging Viking grandpa, Eric. Paul gave a fine performance, and his additions to Led Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song* (fittingly, Thor's theme song from the Marvel movies) sung by Eddy Hyde, along with the fearsome cries of 'pillage the village!' will live long in the memory. Of course, no panto will ever be complete without a scheming villain, and Pippa Denton-Dixey is perfectly cast as the ice-cold Snow Queen. Arriving in a swan-shaped chariot (one of the best pieces of set design I've seen in years), Pippa gives a wonderfully wicked performance – her solo *Let it Go* in the second act was a particularly memorable musical moment. Eddy Hyde's evil ice-cream seller, meanwhile, was an absolute scene-stealer. Armed with a terrifying magic mirror (which breaks shatteringly with the aid of Jaq Frost played by Jacqui Lewis) and a remarkable Italian accent, Slushbucket was the perfect sidekick to the Snow Queen – not least when in disguise as a rather flamboyant '80s hairdresser.

One royal is never enough for a Cumnor Players panto – we've had our fair share of kings and queens over the years, so it was only natural to include, alongside the Snow Queen, a Prince and Princess (Henry Furniss and Rachael Rivers). Consciously and hilariously modelled after

a certain California-based royal couple, these two became the centre of attention wherever and whenever they appeared – very much like their real-life counterparts. Their security detail, Russell and Sheryl Crow (Robin Fisher and Nikki Reid), donned impressive feathered costumes and remained unflappable (geddit?) throughout – although given their vocations, their failure to apprehend hapless robbers Nicky and Robbie (Kate McDougall and Jan Kowal), the sources of so much of the physical comedy and audience interaction that makes the panto so lovely a community event, should perhaps be questioned!

The crows weren't the only animals on stage, of course – Keith, the reindeer, was the four-legged friend without which no panto is complete. Jenny Furniss, as the front end, impressively kept up a Swedish accent (not the easiest of tasks!) throughout the entire show, as well as balancing some rather extensive antlers on her head. Micah Castella McDonald, meanwhile, displayed remarkable fortitude in portraying Keith's back end – and even popped up with some one-liners himself.

The lighting and sound this year was exceptional. A special mention must go to the falling snowflakes lighting effect which really captured a cold snowstorm feeling. The sound was extremely well balanced with the band and singers both given the attention and sound they deserved, and meant all the lyrics of the adapted songs could be clearly heard and enjoyed.

All congratulations must go to Jules Pottle and Ally Baker for directing such a talented cast and band, Avril Horn for costumes that seem to get more and more beautiful every year, stunning makeup looks fit for a queen (quite literally) created by Kim Heffernan and her team, and Cumnor Players' generous sponsors, volunteers and families. This was the perfect way to spend a chilly December night!

Theo Furniss