

ALADDIN – TOTNES OPERATIC ADS
CIVIC HALL TOTNES – JANUARY 2014-01-23
Dir/Chor – Kerry Manley
MD – John Budden
Script – Peter Long and Keith Rawnsley (NODA)

This was my first viewing of a Long and Rawnsley script. It was strong on story telling but rather thin on audience participation. This was a shame as the audience were somewhat slow at responding, not helped by the fact there were only just over 50 in the audience. This was a great shame and all credit to the cast for not letting it dampen their enthusiasm. What does it take to get the people of Totnes off their backsides and down to the Civic Hall to support their local theatre group?

A lot of effort had gone into the staging with some very creative lighting design. Scenery was largely a series of good looking cloths with some larger props for such as the kitchen scene and the show ran very smoothly with regards to scenery and technical aspects. Costumes too were colourful and added to the visual aspect. The cast were supported by a great sounding band of 4 players which really gave punch to the musical numbers. In fact, for me, it was the musical numbers where this show found its strength as I will explain.

The principal cast were all radio miced but for some reason the mikes were only turned on for the musical numbers. This meant that the younger lighter voices were very difficult to hear in the dialogue scenes then suddenly boomed out during the musical numbers. I can't understand why this was done. Why not have the mics on for the dialogue as well, as this would, apart from us hearing better, have given more lift to the dialogue scenes.

The percussionist was excellent but I would have liked him to play a part in the dialogue and action. From experience I know that this instruction should come from the production team. He could have underpinned all prat falls and comic action with percussion effects. This also would have helped lift the dialogue scenes. In addition characters could have had stronger musical entrances and exits, certainly in the initial scenes. This would have helped them bring the show on with them and take it off with them. This, for me, was the reason why the musical numbers dominated.

The cast was largely comprised of children and teenagers with a few adults thrown in for good measure and the large ensemble were well drilled and their routines were very neat and tidy. Due to a shortage of men, some male characters were played by females but this didn't have any adverse affect on the show. Principals got to grips with their characters very well and there were some surprisingly good performances from younger principals. A tiny Genie (James Kingholm) had bags of personality and I liked the Slave of the Ring (Sian Manley). David George (Widow Twankey) and Wishee Washee (Richard Boys) gave a good central core to the show (as the older cast members!!) and worked the audience hard to get some sort of response. Abanazer (Lizzy Eames) made the character work despite cross casting the character and Aladdin (Amy Robinson) and Princess (Muirenn Sutherland) made an effective pair. Where all of these characters came to the fore was in the musical numbers which were all well rendered. I especially liked the UV scene and the mostly modern choices of musical numbers revealed some good voices among the company.

Kerry had ensured that the show was a neat production and with a bigger louder audience there would have been much more atmosphere but all credit to the cast for battling onwards despite that. Remind me to come to next year's panto on the Friday or Saturday !!!