

**NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD**  
SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2016-2017

**Group:** Witham Operatic Society  
**Production:** Spamalot  
**Venue:** Witham Public Hall  
**Date:** 29th.October 2016  
**Director:** Nikki Mundell-Poole

**Introduction**

This is an interesting choice of show to put on and certainly presents a number of challenges. Slick timing, good pace and a big visual impact are all necessary elements if the full potential of the show is to be achieved. It offers the opportunity for many great cameo roles centred around the core casting of King Arthur, his entourage and the Lady of the Lake. Good technical and backstage support is vital to maximise the comedy of the many visual gags.

**Front of House** Patsy Page  
**Bar Manager** Ron Howe

We were given a friendly and efficient welcome and the audience are well catered for with the bar facilities. Thank you for the considerate choice of seats which gave us such a good view.

**Box Office** Janice Hawkes

The show was well attended and the group does appear to enjoy support from the local community.

**Programme** Edward Groombridge  
**Assisted by** Corrina Wilson  
**Foyer display** Corrina Wilson  
**Publicity Manager** Corrina Wilson  
**Assisted by** Edward Groombridge  
**Artwork** Edward Groombridge

The front of house display set the mood for the audience with the 'Olde Sweete Shoppe' complemented by an interesting display of rehearsal photographs. The publicity flyers and programme used familiar motifs from Monty Python, the bright blue background colour allowed all the information to be read easily and the cast photographs were really helpful as once in their various costumes it was not always easy to tell who was who! A helpful synopsis and information about WAOS made for an entertaining programme that had been thoughtfully compiled.

**Publicity Video** Nik Griffin  
**Photography** Matilda Bourne  
**Printing** Solo Press  
**Banners** Essex Sign and Print

All the publicity and visual material looked good and stylistically in keeping with the setting of the show.

**Stage Manager**

Dean Hirst

**Assisted by**

Keith Bradley

**Stage Crew** Graeme Aldred, Ken Hawkes, Jaime O'Donnell-Smith

Although the actual set was a very simple (but effective) design with just the painted flats representing castle walls the team had plenty to keep them busy including wheeling on characters or setting the wall for the rabbit puppeteer among other tasks. Managing these manoeuvres when the show has such a large cast to get on and off stage takes careful timing which worked well. There was never a delay in the scene changes and all went smoothly.

**Properties Manager**

Denise Scrivener

**Assisted by** Janet Hawkes, Rachel Maguire, Calum Mundell-Poole, Pam Whelan

This was another backstage team that was kept busy with a wide variety of props ranging from bibles to shrubbery. Like the visual displays the props were there to highlight a visual joke so were often only on stage for a few minutes. Working around a big cast to ensure the pace didn't drop showed careful rehearsal. Props were carefully chosen and supported the visual comedy.

**Wardrobe**

Sara Lyndon, Debbie Sterling

I understand that the costumes were hired in which is a really sensible decision given the large cast and the many changes required. Often the costumes were seen for just a few minutes such as the Finnish chorus costumes near the beginning of the show or the Jewish chorus and dancers to reinforce a joke or song. It is clear that the team spent a long time preparing and choosing what was needed. Co-ordinating all of this backstage and ensuring everyone appears correctly dressed on cue takes some skilful organisation. This was successfully done and the cast looked magnificent.

**Wigs**

Patsy Page

Some very good choices here, we especially liked Sir Robin's 'page boy' look and the way wigs (and beards) were deployed to enhance characterisations such as Herbert's Father.

**Make Up**

Liz Watson

As with the wigs make-up was kept natural for many characters and used to help the definition of some characters such as the Lady of the Lake. Close co-operation between the costume, wig and make-up team was evident to achieve the overall effect.

**Lighting and Projections**

Nigel Northfield and Trevor Drury

**Assisted by** Anne Dyster, Graham Green, Alex Gwyther, Kris Knox-Crichton,

The lighting team under Nigel's and Trevor's leadership deserve a special mention, the many changes helped the mood of each scene and the use of the back projections and screens was excellent. They highlighted many comic moments and provided narrative support instantly which (everything from Anglo-Saxon style huts to maps or symbols such as the portcullis during the monk's song.)

Meanwhile the side screens frequently showed comment, symbolic representations or comedy images such as the cartoon knights. All of this added to the comedy and were enjoyed by the audience. Given the potential for technical problems the whole sequence ran faultlessly - excellent!

**Sound** Paul Galley & Jason Fenn of Event Sound and Light

With some of the characters 'miked' and some not there were times when the sound balance was uneven and a couple of times the chorus's singing could not be heard at all over the major characters. The use of mikes did mean the dialogue was clearly conveyed to the audience, essential in this show to maximise the comedy.

**Rehearsal Pianist** Emma Nash

An invaluable asset for the musical aspects of the production.

**Chaperones** Janet Hawkes, Emma Loring, Jo Irons, Debra Morgan, Sue Rogers, Cynthia Stead, Andy Tunningley

A very necessary team providing backstage support. Well done.

## **CAST**

**King Arthur** David Slater

David really looked the part with his resplendent beard and slightly vague manner when met with blank responses to his declaration 'I am your king'. It was a shame that right at the beginning David had a stumble over a few lines which slowed the action. He soon recovered and then picked up the pace again leading his knights. His best scenes were with the Lady of the Lake.

**Patsy** Trevor Marks

A great role that surely provided the foundation for Baldrick of Blackadder fame Trevor had just the right demeanour of this underdog who was really smarter than his master. Laden down with his backpack his body language reflected his lowly status. His facial expressions and reactions were so clearly conveyed and the audience responded warmly to him very quickly. He really came into his own in the second half of the show. An excellent performance.

**Sir Lancelot** Kris Tyler

Kris gave us a lovely portrayal of this character, slightly unsure of who or what he really is, the hints at his later revelations were there throughout in a very low-key way. This made him distinctive from the other knights and we really enjoyed his more confident body language in his dancing in the pink vest and his wedding scene. Nicely done.

**Sir Robin** Michael Mundell-Poole

Michael's portrayal of Sir Robin was different again to the other knights, his upright bearing and slightly aristocratic manner meant he frequently looked askance at some of the antics of his fellow knights. His reactions and expressions provided much amusement. When galloping, his wig bounced along with him which was also very funny. We enjoyed his performance.

**Sir Galahad** Craig Tyler

We loved Sir Galahad's transformation from the rather plain Dennis into the flamboyant knight of the flowing locks. His exaggerated hair tossing mannerism became the trade mark for the character combined with the exaggerated poses he struck to ensure he was the centre of attention for a moment or two. A very enjoyable characterisation.

**Sir Bedevere**

Phillip Spurgeon

Phillip's wonderfully exaggerated moustache helped to establish his very military bearing which nicely differentiated him from the other knights. Strong and confident vocal delivery combined with his assertive body language conveyed the sense of a 'macho man'. His scenes with the other knights were particularly good, an impressive characterisation.

**Lady of the Lake**

Constance Lawton

Wow! This lady has a voice that can rattle the rafters. Constance showed an impressive vocal range in this role which demanded everything from the big ballad number to gospel style. Her sparkling costumes and fetching make up added to her 'larger-than-life' characterisation. We loved her pushy manner and diva-like behaviour. 'The Song That Goes Like This' was truly memorable, a really enjoyable performance.

**Prince Herbert/Mrs. Galahad/French Taunter 2** Edward Groombridge

We really enjoyed Edward's doleful characterisation of Mrs. Galahad, not just his appearance but the nasal intonation he used to deliver her lines. This was nicely contrasted with his portrayal of Prince Herbert with his more open body language and slightly camp manner. This was different again to the part of the French Taunter whose aggressive tone coupled with the silly, insulting gestures gave us many chuckles. A versatile performer!

**French Taunter 1/The Knight of Ni/Tim the Enchanter** Nik Graham

Nik seemed to be the one to specialise in the roles that required standing on something and wearing beards! These roles were great fun and very silly but have to be played straight. Nik managed to capture the arrogant tone of the French Taunter well and his convincing delivery of his lines as the Knight of Ni made them all the funnier. As Tim the Enchanter his hermit-like appearance and unworldly air gave us some lovely comedy.

**Mayor/Black Knight**

Richard McNeill

Two small but important roles and managing the physical aspects of the Black Knight was a challenge! The impressive black and red costume which had to shed limbs intrigued us. As the Finnish mayor Richard was very funny, with his bemused look as the 'mistake' was explained and his disappointment as they shuffled off, good reactions and facial expressions.

**Not Dead Fred/Concorde**

Harry Tunningley

Harry did a great job of standing in as 'Not Dead Fred', in this performance, not just vocally but taking on the physicality of the role. He has a good sense of comic timing and gave us some lovely reactions as Concorde. A talent to watch. Well done.

(Dexter Montgomery was not in the performance of the show that I saw.)

**Herbert's Father**

Richard Herring

This was a great cameo role and Richard looked as though he was really enjoying it. The character is so overbearing it would have been tempting to go completely 'over the top' but it never slipped into that. His beard and wig helped to give a bear-like look to the character which worked well. He was also a part of the general ensemble so contributed to many other scenes in the show.

**Lead Minstrel**

Rosie Clarke

As the Lead Minstrel Rosie looked good, her flowing robe and elaborate headdress giving her that slightly exotic appearance. She moved confidently around the stage and led her troupe rhythmically. Sadly we couldn't hear the lyrics of her song due to the imbalance of the sound quality. (Did she have a mike?)

**Historian/Brother Maynard**

Richard Cowen

Richard had a truly scholarly manner as the Historian delivering his narrative in an academic tone. The choice of maroon velvet jacket and bow tie gave him an air of university professorship. As Brother Maynard he gave us a completely different persona giving us some comic moments.

**Guard**

Alice Mason

A small but essential role Alice's military costume helped to provide comic support to her characterisation. She conveyed a sense of uncertainty as to which orders to follow, good timing too.

**Sir Bors**

Gary Rolph

This was another small but important role to help move the story along. Gary presented the character clearly and confidently.

**Rabbit Puppeteer**

Matt Waldie

This was such a ridiculous role which Matt carried out with great aplomb. His physical efforts to manipulate the rabbit while 'hiding' had the audience chuckling out loud. His indignance at being 'discovered' was very amusing.

**Knights of Ni** Elizabeth Chapman, Anita Goold, Annette Maguire, Clare Tunningly

The Knights were a really funny group with their high-pitched wittering and jittery manner, great fun.

**Voice of God**

Eric Idle

What can one say? An impeccable performance.

**Dance Captain**

Olivia Bentley

The dance routines were lively and showed great attention to detail. The 'Girls' had been thoroughly rehearsed and this was reflected in the precision of their performances of pieces in many different styles. Olivia should be highly commended for her work.

**Laker Girls** Olivia Bentley, Daisy Greenwood, Julie Slater, Isabella Chapman, Alice Rydzik, Alice Tunningly

The girls brought glamour and style to the production with their impeccable timing and acrobatic routines. They looked fabulous and performed with great poise and charm, a delightful addition to the show that was much appreciated by the audience.

**Ensemble** Angie Briley, Rosie Clarke, Nik Graham, Richard Herring, Alice Mason, Sandra Trott, Harry Tunningley, Elizabeth Chapman, Anita Goold, Edward Groombridge, Annette Maguire, Richard McNeill, Gary Rolph, Clare Tunningley, Matt Waldie

The ensemble here were certainly kept busy playing everything from plague victims to Jewish dancers. Timing was precise and everyone was really focussed on their role. There were some nice tableaux created, usually at the end of a song highlighting the mood. A really impressive performance showing great commitment.

**Musical Director**

Geoff Osborne

Geoff should be congratulated on achieving the brisk pace the music required and the professional sounding orchestra enhanced this. The quality of the singing was high even though sometimes the lyrics were lost due to the amplification. Cast members sang confidently and expressively reflecting the effort that had clearly been put in to rehearsals.

**Orchestra** Geoff Osborne, Francis Garland, Jessie Tabor, Shaun Ballisat, Sue Long, Emma Nash, Sandy Tate, Steve Hopper, James Stirling, Paul Codling

The orchestra sounded very professional and provided a sound basis for singers to work with. A nice balance of instruments led to a fully rounded sound which added to the slickness of the production.

**Assistant Director & Tap Dance Choreographer**

Gemma Gray

Gemma produced some very lively tap routines for us to enjoy and her role as assistant director invaluable with such a big production. Close working with Nikki has helped produce a coherent production.

**Director**

Nikki Mundell-Poole

The group should be very proud of this production which reflects the degree of confidence they must have in the guidance provided by Nikki. It seems you had a very clear vision of what you wanted and worked tirelessly to achieve it. We were particularly impressed with the overall pace of the show and the polished performances you achieved with the cast.

You had chosen a really strong core group of performers to play King Arthur, Patsy, the Knights and the Lady of the Lake and this meant that other actors responded to them positively. Attention to detail was also evident in the groupings and 'pictures' you created bringing together the dancers and chorus. The management of this large cast and achieving fluid movement of exits and entrances showed great care. So much of the comedy needed quick reactions and responses which took careful rehearsal to achieve the precise timing.

Another aspect of this production which became evident quickly was the cohesion of the backstage and front-stage teams. Careful preparation of every aspect of the production showed in the quality of everything from the programme and publicity material to the technical aspects, the costumes and visual aspects and the performances. We got the impression of a strong team supporting you in bringing this show off the page. The audience were quickly engaged with the show and their enjoyment was reflected in their responses and enthusiastic applause.

Thank you for the opportunity to see this production and your kind hospitality.

Best wishes  
Maggi Fisher

accompanied by  
Penny Davidson