

Michael Gray's Arts Blog

SPAMALOT

WAOS at the Public Hall Witham

24.10.2016

A sprightly Spamalot from WAOS, with a great chorus and some very amusing animations. So alongside the colourful live action, there's a crashing chandelier for the pastiche number, useful glosses for the Chosen People song, a Wikipedia entry for The Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch, a wheel of fortune for Camelot, and much more. The back-drops, too, are digital.

No shortage of proper Pythonesque performances either. Amongst the knights in woolly tights, Kris Tyler's bold Sir Lancelot and Michael Mundell-Poole's spineless Sir Robin – both sounding more Essex Yeomanry than upper crust - and Phillip Spurgeon's Melchett-moustached Sir Bedevere. Craig Tyler – a convincingly radical Dennis – is the dashing Sir Galahad.

His old mum is played, a la Mother Riley, by Edward Groombridge, who's also a French taunter and a priceless Prince Herbert [another hundred people just contracted the plague...]. This kind of imaginative doubling is crucial to this show: Nik Graham is the other taunter, Tim, and the Knight of Ni, Harry Tunningley an irrepressible Not Dead Fred and Lancelot's trusty Concorde. Even Richard Cowen, an amusingly Starkey-ish Historian, is the tedious Brother Maynard in Act Two.

Camelot's first couple are Constance Lawton's diva Lady of the Lake, and David Slater's impressively sung Arthur – a genial, formidable presence. His hang-dog Patsy, a broly in his knapsack, is Trevor Marks.

Similar umbrellas for the big production number, with tap-dancing playing cards. The chorus is brilliantly used, from the campest copacabana for the out-of-the-closet Lancelot to the athletic cheerleaders. Good to see Marcel Marceau with the onion seller amongst the French People.

The audience on opening night were enthusiastically appreciative – whistling, singing along and laughing immoderately at the excellent guard panto routine, the snippet of vintage Python, the Brexit joke.

An impressive production of a cult classic, directed by Nikki Mundell-Poole, assisted by Gemma Gray, with Geoff Osborne in charge of the music. A good omen for another off-the-wall show next spring – Bob Carlton's Return to the Forbidden Planet, Shakespeare's forgotten rock'n'roll masterpiece.