



Society : East Berkshire Operatic Society
Production : Spamalot
Date : 15th – 19th May 2018
Venue : Wilde Theatre
Report by : Susan Boobyer-Pickles

Show Report

Many thanks for inviting Terry and I to your latest production Spamalot. Choosing your closing performance, which coincided with the royal wedding, we did wonder if there would be any effect; it was clear that there was with a reduced audience for the evening and we learnt also for the matinee performance. However, those of us that were in the audience that night were treated to a fantastic evenings entertainment and I do hope we all laughed loud enough for you all. On that note we were both really impressed that you had the foresight and the sense of humour, to amend the lyrics to one of the songs (Brave Sir Robin I think) to allude to this, it was very funny and very appropriate.

Director **Julian Hirst** had a really good understanding of the musical especially the characters who have to be believable even though the whole thing is very silly. The cast were able to play the comedy straight and very well and leave the laughs to the audience which is not always easy – the earnestness of the characters and their mission is key to the success of the comedy I feel – and everyone did this brilliantly. Julian must have had an exciting time with an amazing cast and an equally amazing production team to bring his vision to fruition. I hope you enjoyed the process as much as we enjoyed the performance.

On entry to the auditorium we saw gauze with a wonderful Spamalot logo. Throughout the show the gauze was used most effectively to depict time and place changes and an animated map. Well used to depict the different countries. All projections were well conceived and created and **Duncan Bruce** clearly had a very good understanding of what was required. Duncan should also be commended on the programme and other advertising materials. How wonderful for EBOS to have someone with such creativity in the society. I know EBOS regularly submit to NODA and win plaudits for their programmes and I am sure this one will be just as well received; there were some interesting snippets and acknowledgements in the programme which made for an interesting read and I loved the medieval fonts.

Once the gauze was removed a fabulous set was revealed which was versatile enough to accommodate all the different scenes. I particularly liked the double steps leading up to the ramparts, the stained-glass window and the ability to quickly make small changes for the different settings which allowed the show to run smoothly. Designed by **Victoria Spearing** and built and painted by an in-house team everyone involved should be pretty pleased with the result. If you want to send Terry and I a selection of photos of the set in the different guises, with and without cast members to give scale, then we would be happy to consider it for next years awards – obviously we don't know what else we will see and you will have to double check the guidelines on the NODA website to make sure it complies but it was a really good set. It's hard to tell who was responsible for the concept of using the "lifting machine" but it worked very well whenever used and really helped with the Black Knight scene. A very good idea and one I have never seen before at an amateur production of Spamalot.

The staging and scene changing was managed by SM **Andrew Cooper**, DSM **Duncan Bruce** and a large team of EBOS members. There was only one issue for me and that was we could see the platform operator in the Black Night scene – the other scenes seemed to work well as the operator was screened off – perhaps it was impossible for this scene for some reason but at least the operator could have worn a black balaclava or similar to make themselves less visible to the audience. This was the only standout issue in an otherwise perfectly crewed production. Well done everyone who supported the cast well.

In the same way the props were all very appropriate and while we can marvel at the larger props such as the trojan rabbit, the WAIT rock and the cart – the multitude of other small and larger props were all very true to the period and the production whether it be fish, weapons, pom poms, umbrellas or coconuts! Personally, I would like to give a shout out for the shrubbery – who doesn't like a good shrubbery. Well done **Debbie Mann** for co-ordinating the many props required for this show.

Sometimes it's hard to differentiate props from costume and I thought that Patsy's backpack was well done becoming a seat in Act 2. Overall the costumes were of an incredibly high standard. Arthur and his Knights looked amazing as did Patsy and the Lady, the Laker girls had multiple costumes; and x6 this was must have been well over 50 costumes, plus the many and varied roles of the ensemble – a very big job for **Bronwyn Hodgkins**, **Sara Richardson** and their helpers. The EBOS wardrobe must be a very valuable resource. The opening traditional costumes for the fish slapping song were colourful and opened the show creating a very high expectation which was fulfilled from start to finish. The Laker girls and dancers looked very well co-ordinated in all their numbers and throughout the costumes were well presented, clean and fitted well.

On the technical side the lighting was conceived by **Alan Valentine** and overall it was a well thought out lighting plot. There was some exceptionally precise stage down spots – well done technical team and cast for getting this so correct. For the main scenes the lighting was clean without distracting shadows or blank spots – in fact it was quite refreshing to have a brightly lit stage where you could see everything clearly. Of course there was room for special effects and when used they were well done and effective such as star cloth, glitter ball and coloured lighting.

Equally well done was the sound management by **Tom Horrox** which was crisp and clear throughout. The Voice of God reverb worked well. There were no issues with the balance between voice and music and everyone could be heard. SFX were all good and cued well. Good job.

Tim Cumper had clearly done a brilliant job in the rehearsal period as all the numbers were sung with real confidence and good diction appropriate to characterisation. He also assembled and conducted a small but wonderful group of musicians who produced a lovely tuneful sound throughout. Volume and clarity were pitched correctly to ensure the voices were not compromised.

Sophie Horrox took on the role as Choreographer and she must have had a busy time. Not only did the Laker Girls have a multitude of numbers but there were also several group numbers. With the space available and the number of routines it is quite hard to keep each number unique but overall Sophie did a fabulous job – Not Yet Dead/jazzy, Laker Girls/Pom Poms and the use of umbrellas stood out. As usual if using a prop then total co-ordination is needed to get the full effect and while the pom poms were perfect one or two umbrellas were a bit out but when

reviewing perfection – the little things stand out. Obviously working closely together with Tim on the musicality and timing it was a job well done to both of you.

I want to start with the ensemble who took on the many and varied smaller roles including participating in some of the musical numbers. Everyone played their roles extremely well including the use of accents. I don't want to single anyone out particularly but the French taunting guards, the Knight of Ni and the Black Knight did stand out as being performed extremely well. Bethanie Rutland also did a wonderful job as The Historian, Terry Adlam as Dennis's Mother and Damian Thomas as Prince Herbert. Well done everyone we enjoyed watching all of you.

Adrian McDougall (King Arthur) clip clopped his way on stage in perfect "galloping" style and had us smiling from the start. Good strong singing voice and lovely diction gave a wonderful gravitas and kingly manner. Not sure King Arthur ever smiles but that only enhances the comedic moments and a solid understanding of the character and the script only enhanced the comedy. There was a surety in Adrian's performance and a nice interaction with all the other players. Good tapping too!

Andy Carmichel (Patsy) provided the said clip clopping perfectly with all the actions required. Andy was so expressive in both face and body. He performed well in all the numbers, but it is in Act 2 that we really get to see him in all his glory as the lead in the iconic Always Look on the Brightside of Life number. With many asides and looks, the audience were really on the side of Patsy from the start, a hilarious portrayal of the put upon "sound man"!!

Ashleigh Wells (Sir Robin)

Adam Wilkinson (Sir Lancelot)

Justin Ferrington (Sir Bedevere)

Stuart Hayllor (Sir Galahad)

These four gentlemen played their parts superbly. Great acting and singing throughout each with their own character and foibles. Ashleigh was very confident especially in all his numbers; quite brave to tackle a well-rehearsed number and then change the words. Impressive. Adam as the limp Lancelot could have gone for it at the end with Prince Herbert but otherwise a good all-round performance. Stuart had a wonderful knight voice and an impressive hair flicking wig; a particularly good performance with The Lady in The Song that goes like this. The whole Camelot scene really stood out for the Knights, Arthur and the whole company – well done for managing all the choreography.

Emily Burton (The Lady of the Lake) gave a magnificent performance as The Lady although my heart did go into my mouth at her first entrance on the lifting machine – a very impressive first impression that only got better as the performance progressed. Her songs were glorious in sound and equally glorious in performance. Song like This was fabulous with Sir Galahad – loved the setting with the boat and candelabra – and whatever happened to my part sung with the right amount of passion and angst.

The Laker Girls performed numerous numbers and must have been busy in the dressing room and running back and forth. I really loved all your performances, everyone seemed to know all the steps and all your costumes provided a striking and colourful foil to the more muted shades of the knights and ensemble and the castle. Stand out performances were the Can Can, the Pom Pom dance where there was some brilliant and precise positioning and the Brazilian dance but all were performed really well.

Finally, a quick nod to the tricks – the Knights of Ni, The Black Knight, the Knight that loses his head, the rabbits and the rock. It takes a lot of effort to get these things right. So many congratulations to everyone who put in the time and effort to ensure these parts of the show worked effectively.

As the show ended both Terry and I agreed this was a truly wonderful production with very little to comment on except how brilliant everyone was – thanks for a really great night!.

Susan Boobyer-Pickles

Joint NODA Representative – London Region District 14