

## David Beach Trophy Competition 2013

Oasis Theatre in association with Hocus Pocus : Friday, 5 April.

### “The Rocky Monster Show – Junior Version”

#### **Preliminaries**

We were received with the usual, courteous and warm welcome including Lewis, resplendent in a waist-Coat-of-Many-Colours! I was accompanied by my wife to this performance, hence the sometimes use of the specific rather than the ‘royal’ we! Excellent seats had been reserved for us at center rear of the auditorium. Prior scene-setting was two enclosed and decorated areas downstage of the main tabs. The standard announcements were made at 7.34pm.

#### **PRODUCTION**

##### **Libretto**

The themes of Malcolm Siron’s ‘Junior Version’ of this show are ‘a riotous mix of The Addams Family, Young Frankenstein and Phantom of the Opera’ as stated in the pre-publicity. It could have added ‘and a touch of Daphne Du Maurier’s ‘Rebecca’. Being devised for performance by young people it postures zany ideas and a joyful need for the audience to suspend disbelief that such shenanigans could possibly take place! Being a ‘rock’ musical it features some jazzy songs, an array of interesting characters and varied opportunities for movement. The dialogue is sometimes sharp though not often witty and the lyrics of the eighteen songs are a good balance between solos, duets and chorus numbers. My copy omitted some of the Production Notes (ppg 5-11) but the surviving ones on lighting, sound and characterisation gave precise guidance to the director. The piece is timeless and the place (Arkham) is stated as “a strange village in a neglected corner of England” and presumed to be in a sort of time warp. There are some humorous ‘panto’ elements in this script, eg the running gag of “control yourself” to Mrs D and the idea that she hears Sfx before they happen and also musical humour as when SuperGroup were programmed into snatches of *Money, Money, Money* etc. whilst singing *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The artistic success thus depends on the director imbuing the performers with the energy associated with rock musicals, a constant flow of action without hiatuses and characters that are believable, however bizarre. It is, however, important that the music should be subordinate to the libretto: it is the ‘play’ rather than the ‘musical’ aspects of the piece that gives it the dramatic impetus that should lift it above mere musical entertainment.

##### **Direction**

Georgina Charnock is congratulated, having put together a cohesive, well presented version of the story. First, some generalisations. The production certainly had available the necessary amount of energy and there were memorable moments and aspects of performance throughout the show. The singing was enthusiastic and well rehearsed and the dancing well-coordinated. There were many directing touches to enjoy but the following few examples remain with us starting with aspects of **creativity** and staging ideas. It was an intriguing start to have the chorus assembled facing upstage for the opening number and sections turning to the audience with their input to the song. It was the first example of the somewhat large and empty stage space being used imaginatively. We Loved the Ghouls’ graceful dancing during 1.2 and also the fact that both Igor and the housekeeper (separately) came through the audience on their first entrance. The dramatic idea of facing upstage was repeated for the introduction of Fenton and to have it happen just the twice was acceptable (no idea should be overdone)! We liked the clever idea of the Narrator doubling as prompt and, in the circumstances, that worked well and was not at all distracting. Congratulations also for providing actors with easy stage experience by using them as ‘sidekicks’, e.g. the Nun doubling as a backing solo to the Preacher, also Batty Girl, Station Master and Police Inspector all having assistants. Using the recorded choruses as musical



numbers certainly kept the production costs down and provided support for the company. 'Love' became quite comic when the rest of the principals took the mickey when acting as a backing group. Well done. We loved the grouping of the Supremes at stage Left during *Lady Love*, the very good crowd effect during exit from 'the fire' and also the total integration of the tinies in some of the company numbers. The 'panto'-like walk-down finish allowed your enthusiastic audience the opportunity to praise the considerable achievement of each member of your group. There were some good examples of *ensemble cohesion*, so important in musicals. The fact that each section turned as one during the opening number and that realistic impression of group terror during the stampede away from the 'fire' are two that stay in the mind. **Stage Grouping** and movement are always important but particularly so on that big space. There was rarely any sense of lack of motivation for movement and stage dominance was afforded to each one that had important bits of plot to deliver. Indeed, all principals had clearly been directed to make full use of the stage. **Pace.** Arguably, the pace was a bit even but this is a personal niggle. Many scenes were well-timed and most of the principals very sure of their lines. Cue-bite is, however, an acting fundamental that can often be overlooked in musical theatre: any lack of it slows the pace unnecessarily. It would be remiss of me not to mention here the aspects of the direction that **merit further thought** and I offer the following five points. Mrs Danvers' screeching became a bit much as the performance went on: comical at first but too loud and therefore grating. Having established a 'gag', beware of overdoing it. The fixed lights on the Machine were effective but were left on during the blackouts and were thus distracting. It was a pity that (on Friday) Mungo failed to appear when first scripted to do so. More understandable were the one or two incidences of Toy Boy facing upstage during dialogue. Finally, lead players can sometimes be subject to a tendency to unconscious foot movement whilst delivering lines which comes across as lack of confidence: there is a strength in stillness. The remarks immediately above are offered merely as pointers for the future, of course, and took away not one whit of the audience's enjoyment of the evening. Well done.

**Choreography** plays a large part in any musical. The secret of good choreographic discipline is simplicity, whether applied to selected dancers or to chorus movement. All credit, then, to Dianne Turner for her achievements showing the grain of many rehearsal hours, I'm sure. It was all enjoyable but some of the high points are worth a mention. The standard was set from the opening tableau with the young ghouls crouching downstage, raising interest, as did their flat-faced expressions during the song. Design was good during both *Rock&Roll* and *Flash Crash*. Then came *Time Warp* which was 'something else' as the saying goes. The entire audience were caught up in the energy and enthusiasm of the entire company. So much so that, when we were invited onto the stage to join in, there was no lack of volunteers! It 'stopped' the show. The two principals moved naturally during the Romantic Duet and we enjoyed the applied enthusiasm of the company during *Stepping Out on the Town*, enhanced as it was with the fluidity of the two senior dancers and the mini-snatch of chorus-line high kicks. The finale was as well rehearsed as one would expect.

**Musical direction.** No specific credit in the programme so it is presumed that Georgina also directed the chorus and soloists. This was a successful aspect of this show since, in broad terms, the quality of the singing was good.

**Interpretation of the musical content.** Not having had access to the musical score I shall limit my comments to the fact that it was presumed to be accurate and seemed to me to be 'spot on'.



The actors are complimented in that most of them demonstrated an awareness of the need for theatre skills. More detail appears below under Individual Performances but one or two general credits apply here. The cast were comfortable with their roles and their relationship with each other and the degree of mutual support between leads and supporting players was impressive. As a director myself, I am well aware of what good rehearsal that reflects. Well done director and cast.

**Acting Confidence and skills.** We were impressed with what had been achieved and, here, mention only a few aspects which have a bearing on personal direction. We noted that the Station Master had been induced to speak slowly and the result was a suitably and necessarily weird mood to that early scene. The relaxed style of the Narrator was the correct counterpoint to the zany content of the script. We did feel that both the newly-qualifieds could have overcome the initial awe to gush a bit more about their need to succeed professionally. Most of the key characters were possessed of stage presence and most supporting roles were low key but phrased well. There were also moments where the minor roles showed the product of careful rehearsal, such as Batty Girl 2s sexy dance.

**Quality of the singing. The chorus.** From the opening number worked they hard, gave their all in *Flash Crash, Burn, Time Warp, Walk Again* and the reprise of *Evolution* to round off an energetic musical evening. **The principals.** The Prologue *Evolution* was hauntingly sung by the soloist Tamsin; Dan and Rebecca proved themselves to be natural duettists in both *Castle in the Sky* and *Called Love*, Fenton was good in *Rock&Roll*, Mungo and Elsa coped well with *We're in Love* and Preacher was an enthusiastic evangelist during *Burn*.

### DRAMATIC ACHIEVEMENT

**Playing to the audience.** There is a constant to all forms of performance: it is never to forget that it is for the benefit of the audience, not the performers! There were some instances of playing across the stage or even facing upstage. It might seem a moot point to make, given the width of the Regal stage and that most of the leads were using throat mikes. The principle, however, is sound: play to the back row of the audience, i.e. 'cheat it out over the footlights'.

**Interpretation of the text.** Could hardly be faulted because it was so faithfully followed and the story well told. A libretto, however, is not sacrosanct and, given the constraints of the company, you minimised the scripted staging instructions without losing any of the structure of the piece.

**Dramatic Impact.** By the show's spoof nature it is not easy to find dramatic tension amid all the lampooning that's going on. One might suggest that more shock, horror or even revulsion could have been built into the couple's discovery of the true nature of Fenton's work or a greater tension sought between village and castle but it's a moot point.

### STAGE PRESENTATION

**Design.** That bare stage worked perfectly well for this production. The two mini-enclosures at Stage Left and Stage Right were nicely decorated with greenery and boom mikes and served the respective locations of backing group and the rather grand chair for the Narrator.

**Scenery and furniture.** We loved the open stage space being invaded by smoke to create a spooky atmosphere ahead of the opening number. At 1.2 a new dimension was revealed as the mid-stage drapes drew back to reveal a back-cloth depicting arched balustrades to suggest a castle environment. That was all that was required and worked perfectly well.

**Changes.** Were swiftly and competently done.

**Props.** The Rejuvenator Machine was crudely effective. That is not a derogatory statement because it cleverly gave the impression of being 'home-made' and added to the wonder that monsters were indeed being successfully created. The one snag with it was that the 'on' lights



were very bright and, because permanent, very distracting during the blackouts and rather spoiling the dramatic effect. Loved the nice 'Burn' placards carried to reinforce the Preacher's song.

**Lighting.** A major aspect of the production. The guidance given in the Notes almost amount to instructions and you succeeded in fulfilling them! Some notable examples. The back-lit opening tableau set the 'horror' mood well. We enjoyed the well-focused spot work and the timing of it for the narrators chair and loved the 'lattice window' logo splayed across the stage. There was a quite effective red glow for the 'fire' which lit up the scrambling villagers but suggest that a trick was missed in that something could have been waved in front of the spot (as suggested in the script) to give a flicker effect. Well done.

**Sound.** Another considerable credit, well designed and mainly at the right level. An excellent train sound including the slamming of doors made one sense that the platform was just off-stage! The very important thunder (and lightning) was invariably dead on cue and very effective – but just now and then a tad too loud. Well done again.

**Costume & Make-up** Considerable credit goes to Rachel Wylde and her team for the design and execution of the costumes, all of which were very appropriate to the production and to the individual characters. Both of the internal groups, the Ghouls and the Superbs, were particularly well dressed. The general themes of the source musicals were cleverly incorporated. The same attention to detail was evident in the effective make-up and choice of wigs.

### **Production Summary.**

The remarks above that are intended as creative criticism are, of course, merely my opinions and are intended as food for thought. You must decide whether or not they are valid pointers for the future. They took away not one whit of the audience's enjoyment of what was an entertaining performance. You focussed on your strengths, had good individual cast leads and the chorus made full use of their opportunities to enjoy themselves. The technical team was very capable and the overall musicality was pleasing. A considerable achievement, which left your audience wanting more of the same! Very well done to the whole team. You had a lot of information on your one-page, folded, A4 programme but I must regret that you omitted including the references to the Fellowship and the entry of this show for the David Beach Trophy. Such inclusions are mandatory. Please also allow a plea that future programmes should list the cast strictly in order of appearance, since that helps an audience to know who's who, and helps an adjudicator to give credit to the right person!

### **INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES**

Some individual achievements have already been mentioned under Production and in such cases the notes below are additional.

**Chorus/Villagers including the children.** All fully played their small parts and, in terms of being part of an ensemble, please remember that all parts are important, irrespective of how many lines you have. All were well rehearsed. I regret that there are too many to mention individually but I'm sure that I'll be forgiven for stating that Beth Beauchamp and Sarah Morton established themselves as positive individuals within the crowd!

**Ghouls.** Sophie Elston, Amy Miller, Dianne Turner and Ella Willcox. Considering that you were quite scary(!) it was quite a contrast to see that you were also graceful dancers. Well done.

**Superbs.** Alisha Coles, Tamsin Ferguson, Lily Grove and Suzie Mansfield. As substitute 'Supremes', we thought that you sang and bopped charmingly. I must add that Tamsin sweetly sang the opening number *Evolution* and again later in *Lady Love*.



Peter Lancaster as **Narrator** easily performed as the anchor of the performance. This was the easy product of a warm voice, a chummy confidence and good diction.

**Professor Fenton** by James Dix. A major undertaking and well done. Here was good projection despite the half-mask. You have good stage presence but need to beware of sometimes a tendency to speak too fast.

Daniel Boulton was **Daniel!** The first half of "a nice couple". You were clearly either very confident or a very good actor because seemingly very relaxed. Your rounded voice has a pleasant timbre but some lines were a tad quiet. Part of a harmonious duet, sung in English!  
**Rebecca** by Yasmin Turner. The second half of the 'nice couple'. Pointed your lines meaningfully and with very good diction. Word-perfect as well. (Personal note: as I would expect as your mother's daughter!) Well done.

Rolando Charnock played **Igor**. A tour-de-force of agility, jumping a lot – and comically, because not always expected. A manic leader during the stunning *Time Walk* and characterised by that sideways gallop from anywhere to the next spot. Well done.

**Mrs Danvers** was by Carla Thresher. Delivered with great attack and confidence. At ease on stage and a well-realised character. Beware of speaking somewhat fast so that some plot is lost and that screech was too loud sometimes. Good acting technique in that your 'blue light' work was always done in character.

Jodie was yet another Thresher and played **Gloria**. Speech patterns were good, well structured and meaningful. An actress with good delivery and thus, surprisingly, a quiet singer.

**Ria** was played by Emma Ronald. Here was a brave actress who, albeit in a supporting role, did a solo dance number requiring concentration and delighted the audience with it. Well done.

Amber Milsom was **Mungo**. This character needed a strong portrayal and we were not disappointed. Very good stage attack in *Stepping Out*.

**Elsa** by Sharlene Leader. Competently done, and did well to concentrate throughout the show and be a good support and opposite number to Mungo.

Rita Cramp was **Batty Girl 1**. The part could have been lost in other hands but here was a natural comic who delivered in spades. Well done.

Stephen Butt was **Toy Boy**. He had his spot as the imposingly tall object of the same name song.

**Station Master** was bravely played by Lily Grove, a small but important part.

John Knight was the **Police Inspector**, who easily conveyed the slightly obsessive need to arrest somebody – and for any reason that occurred to him! Nicely done.

**Preacher** was by Ryan Hemmington. Here was a keen evangelist with God-fearing eyebrows! We enjoyed his pseudo-comic song, an enthusiastic presentation of *Burn* and, incidentally, word-perfect with it.

Derrek Mitchell had his moment as **Elvis**, suitably clad and the right size, he did his best with *Blue Suede Shoes* – a nice solo piece.

**Senior Dancers** Dianne Turner and Sophie Elston floated, ie hoofed with grace and style.

**Supporting Roles** were played by Nina Gould, Lucy Hargrove, Suzi Mansfield, Suzi Toms and Adam Sydenham.

### SUMMARY

First Half ran for an hour; interval of 25 minutes; second half for 50 minutes; total time of 2 hours 15 minutes, about right for an entertainment aimed at children-of-all-ages! Special thanks to all you involved in the months of hard work on costumes and props, for the hours given up to rehearsal and not forgetting this run, with chaperones, FOH support, etc. You put together a show that thoroughly entertained both of your audiences. Thank you on behalf of your audiences for entertaining us all. We shall look forward to our next visit.

16 Apr 13

Ron Roberts, Adjudicator