

Sleeping Beauty

society/company: **West Wickham Pantomime Society** (directory)

performance date: **09 Jan 2015**

venue: **Wickham Hall, West Wickham, Kent**

reviewer/s: **Johnny Utah** (Independent review)



West Wickham Pantomime Society has once again tempted us all, both young and less young, to savour their annual panto, this time, an adaptation of Sleeping Beauty. The sets, backdrops, costumes, sound and lighting are as high quality as that of a professional production. The Costume design team must have been sewing into the night to create these master pieces; in particular the glitzy costumes of Nurse Penny Cillin (Nursey) and that of the fabulously wicked Poison Ivy with its spider web and trailing ivy designs. By laying that groundwork, the audience can relax knowing to expect a quality performance.

The cast hold the audience's attention throughout, with a mixture of cheery songs, easy jokes, shocks and adventure, while the crew play their part with seamless scene changes, varying light projections, (even if a little blurry sometimes), and timely, dramatic sound effects. A special plaudit for band leader and keyboard player, Brian Read, who bounces the show along, sometimes using a score, but mostly without, and, well, making it up as he goes along, which just adds to the amusement.

The hilarious comedy duo, Nursey and Sniffles, played by Tony Dunne and David Warsop respectively, own the stage with aplomb, (and probably experience of playing similar parts every year – they were too natural to be panto virgins!). They undoubtedly overshadow their baddie opposites, Duck and Dive, in their acting, comic timing and singing. Dunne expertly handles some audience giggling, adding to the panto style, and showing his professionalism. Fortunately, the baddie team is strengthened by a bewitching Poison Ivy; Jessica Talmage's striking performance scares the kids with every wicked stare, flick of her pointy fingers and commanding evil strides.

An outstanding dance by the children as menacing spiders adds to her evil. The young dancers have clearly put in a lot of work and the result is rewarding.

The show also benefits from a talented supporting cast, such as Vicky Kalber, who appears in two guises (Mario & Sous Chef), and performs them both brilliantly; she is well deserving of a lead role.

Prince Charming (Phil Burns) and Princess Aurora (Olivia Morris) perform well, only a little impassively on occasion. Their dance is highly entertaining, particularly some nifty footwork by Burns. Morris shines in her solo, beautifully singing a very difficult song; along with a duet from the King and Queen, these strong performances make up for sometimes flat and tuneless songs in other places.

It doesn't give too much away to tell you there is an audience participation element, with the popular Time Warp; only it had to be mentioned as it is a great song to get everyone up and dancing, but led by the baddies, it leads to confusion as the actors 'jump to the (stage) left' when they really ought to jump to the audience's left. The decision/mistake would be easy to change/correct, and really only leaves the audience awkward amongst strangers and bashing each other. It also drags on a bit and the poor kids are tired by this point, wriggling in their seats, and really wanting it all to be over. The reprise is unnecessary.

With the fabulous costumes and a committed amateur cast who obviously enjoy themselves onstage immensely, this is a panto worth seeing.

At £8 a ticket, and a gem of a local theatre venue, the West Wickham Pantomime Society has done themselves proud. An altogether good fun, easy-watching pantomime.

