

NODA REVIEW
ROBINSON CRUSOE AND THE PIRATES
Mad GROUP – Marlborough
Director – Jackie Plyer
Vocal Coach – Gaby Kavanagh
Script – Alan Frayn

I can always rely on MAD Group to produce one of the better pantomime I see each year, and combined with an Alan Frayn script, they couldn't go wrong really!

This is one of Alans scripts that I am less familiar with and have never directed. This is now the third time I have seen it and it is really growing on me. It is like Dick Whittington in many ways but with much more opportunity for under water spectacle during the sinking scene, glamorous costumes due to the setting in Brazil and great opportunities for 5 smaller roles that only appear in Act 2 but are much more than cameos with a few lines. Most of these roles can be cross cast if needs be so groups with a shortage of males can cope with this script very well.

Principal Boy (played traditionally) and principal girl gave strong performances but as always, the larger roles go to the comic element. Dame Margarita Juicilita was nicely played with a gentle eye to the comedy and was nicely balanced by Captain Seasalt and Nutty Nick. The actor playing Nutty always gives a very lively performance and engages well with the audience and is clearly a great favourite here at Marlborough.

Trouble comes in the form of Cut Throat, nicely played with just the right level of threat without turning the audience against him and the comic pair of Skull Duggery and Cross Bones. They worked well together, and their comic banter was well delivered.

Once we get the desert island, we meet yet more characters. Each of these presents chances for comedy and very different characterisations to give variety. This was achieved well here. Mumbo Jumbo, the man-eating tribe leader and Hocus Pocus the witch doctor complemented each other nicely. I loved Hocus Pocus's make up which suited this performer admirably (if you know you know !!). Davy Jones (of the locker fame) is a small role but makes his mark to get some more boos. Coral, Friday and Poll complete the list of smaller but important roles. Friday turns out to speak perfect English and is very educated. Poll the parrot was played with a nice touch of comedy and liveliness by this young performer.

There was a chorus of thousands in this production .. well certainly about 30, which often filled the stage to overflowing. However, they were very well drilled and the choreography was nicely performed and the main musical numbers had nice energy. Even the smallest cast members had clearly been rehearsed well and gave strong performances. Choreography used the stage well and was well designed.

Scenery and costumes are largely home produced here and looked colourful and effective. There was a nice colourful and well painted front drop which was rolled up and down and served for many of the front drop scenes. Lighting and sound complemented perfectly. This group has a great technical team who know what they are doing.

There was no live band and backing tracks were used. This can lead to problems, but the cast had been well drilled by Gaby and vocally the show was very good indeed. There was no hesitance which can result from backing tracks. The only thing that was missing was live percussion which is useful for underpinning prat falls and action, but this did not detract from the production.

Jackie kept the whole production moving along at a nice pace. There were no dead spots and no pauses between scenes and dialogue was delivered with great pace and style. She should be proud of the end product.