



Cornwall Drama Association

a service to amateur drama in Cornwall

President: **Simon Williams** Patron: **Robert Duncan**

CDA Adjudication of a Pantomime

Probus Parish Players Production of Rapunzel 2025

Seen on 20th February by Jo Nicolle and Oriel Bennett

This report and comments therein can only relate to the particular performance seen by the Adjudicators, and any observations made may not have been valid at other performances. The Adjudication report is designed to applaud excellence, to recognise talent and to encourage self-reflection which leads towards higher standards in Amateur Theatre in Cornwall.

INTRODUCTION

Originating over four hundred years ago, the story of Rapunzel is best known to us as one of the tales of the Brothers Grimm published a mere 150 years ago. Since she became a Disney princess she has joined the annual list of pantomimes to be enjoyed in yet another format, and it was nice to see one of these less often performed pantomimes being presented in Probus. We were privileged to have a pre-show tour of the new backstage facilities, including the scenery, comms, lighting rigs and stage extensions, in their first use, and it was a joy to sit in raked seating which allows one to see over the heads of those in front. Expensive it may be, but over time will surely pay dividends.

This script, by established writers Bradford and Webster, contains all the elements we expect from the genre, and the story of the young girl trapped in a seemingly inaccessible tower, and her rescue by the Prince out to prove himself worthy of his calling, contains all the conventional fairytale themes of friendship, adversity, evil to be conquered, love to be requited. These all need to be clear in the story as it unfolds; and the pantomime traditions of slapstick humour, rolling gags, audience participation must also be addressed with enthusiasm to create a thoroughly diverting show in this uniquely British brand of entertainment. How the production team and large cast of Probus Parish Players tackled these challenges – even with the advantages of the extra staging and the backstage improvements – is detailed below.

STAGE PRESENTATION

Sets and set dressing:

The village hall was full, viewers sitting on the newly installed raised seating giving excellent sight lines for everyone. No clues came from the red drapes within the proscenium, which had a curtained archway at SL onto a wide forestage.

Backdrops were provided by scenery curtains, depicting the different settings for the story. A cobbled street with village houses and the Probus Victorian Jubilee Lamp showed good perspective and was dressed with a free-standing signpost that seemed ignored; a grand, sweeping staircase backed the Palace Throne room, and was graced with two tall, studded, purple velvet thrones; Dame Trixie's pink and purple salon, artfully represented in cartoon-like simplicity by a row of mirrors and clients' swivel chairs, with large bottles of hairdressing products on trolleys was light and colourful; a forest scene with its ferny undergrowth allowed journeys to be indicated, and housed the falling bench gag. All these were well painted with some artistry and with a nice blend of realism and panto exaggeration. Every one gave a clear indication of location and was in subdued enough colouring not to distract from the action and costumes in front. Each backcloth's use altered the dimensions of the stage depending on its hanging position and this had to be considered in the staging of company numbers in particular. The curtains were easily drawn for speed of scene changes, though a number of scenes were kept in front of the red plush stage curtains to enable ease of dressing the set for the next action. Could the forest backdrop perhaps have been used more often for these FOT scenes, (eg the scene where the Prince bemoans being "Lost in the forest.") if the curtain was brought forward on its runners? There's nothing wrong with acting in front of a curtain, but it was a pity not to utilise these beautifully executed backdrops to full advantage.

Rapunzel's tower reached up to the space above the flies valance; it might have looked taller if it could have been tapered, and the window made to seem smaller and therefore further away. It was nicely draped with strands of ivy, and we saw the same ivy adorning the foyer so the audience were given a taste of the story upon entry. Standing flats were brought onstage for Rapunzel's turret room: wooden beams, a chest of drawers and filled bookshelves, one cleverly concealing a hidden door, a roaring fire and a tall arched and curtained window fitted the bill. Minimal furniture allowed for best freedom of movement for the large cast, and the sets worked well to place the dramatic narrative.

Lighting:

With the technical 'machinery' of light and sound provided by a professional company we could expect it to be effective. A generous rig of lanterns on stage and front of house gave ample equipment to let imagination run wild with a plot that provided colourful and atmospheric effects as the story unfolded, with the valuable addition of two manual follow spots to supplement stage washes by highlighting individuals. A riot of colour in LEDs, various gobos, moving heads etc swirled around the stage in many of the scenes and quite frequently over the audience. These intense hues often enhanced the musical numbers or highlighted a dramatic scene, but their 'Wow' factor effectiveness was perhaps diluted by overuse: sometimes 'less is more'. Spotlights were well aimed from the stage flies and from the back of the auditorium to illuminate individuals, and there

was an appreciable understanding of suitable colouring to evoke mood and to support character (eg the Fairy's purple for her entrance and for her transforming spell on the King) or a location (the green light in the forest on the rescue mission). Warm white light focused on solo artists in their songs. The spot on the Spider was a little early allowing sight of the backstage wings but lightning and camera flashes were prompt. Apart from one hiatus in Act Two, where Bob and Curly ad-libbed their way out of a missed blackout after the rope ladder gag, the cues were timely and well linked with the sound.

Sound:

The principal characters were all mic'd so their dialogue came across loud and clear as far as volume goes, but some of the diction was a little indistinct and cast members would do well to consider their articulation, ending words and sentences with clarity. To maintain a balance of voices, those unmic'd chorus members with lines to say must be encouraged to speak out with confident projection or they simply get lost. The volume of the backing tracks was well matched to the amplified voices so that the music mostly supported the singers though occasionally it was a trifle overwhelming. Thunder and eerie sound effects for Gothel's entrances and her spells enhanced her evil character, and the thud as she fell reverberated nicely. The souging wind effects around the Tower were right to suggest its height and loneliness. The owl hooting in the forest was a nice touch.

Properties:

Personal props were well handled. The dark bottle for Rapunzel's tears, and the fairy's appropriately floral wand both looked right. Bob and Curly managed their mops well, but it was too clear that there were no collisions or near misses so the 'injury' gags didn't quite come off. The foot in pail joke worked well, but was there still a label stuck to the bucket? The oversized bottles of hair products on the trolley were labelled but hard to read, and it's worth filling plastic bottles, maybe with sand, to give them weight so they don't fall over and sound so empty. The Rubik's cube gave the Prince something to play with in his boredom and his hand mirror reminded us of his vanity. Rapunzel's teddy was a sweet childhood touch, her books were good, and Bob and Curly hiding their faces behind opened volumes worked very well as a piece of comic business. The Dame's 'pie in face' gag was disappointing: we recognise that the audience expects these conventional panto set pieces, but either go the whole hog with a great pile of whipped cream and a good build up, or don't do it at all. An idea is to glue a sponge to the plate so that the 'cream' topping is lifted, looking far more than it is, while remaining safe for the face splat. Cleverly used for comic effect, though, were Dame Trixie's large patched hankie and Captain of the Guard's plain white one, put to good use polishing the King's silver-topped cane or his own head. The King's cane, whether the actor's own necessary stick or just a prop for the character, was used naturally to aid walking, to lean on, and to make assertive points in the dialogue. The cameras and autograph books for the paparazzi were waved with enthusiasm. Curly and Bob's rope ladder, and the key for the secret door, (it would have been nice to see a keyhole!) were both a good size, and the time honoured bench gag worked to the audience's great satisfaction! The skill of the props department is not only amassing what's needed but also having the right thing in place at the right time so the action is not delayed. Well done.

Costumes and make-up:

A word about tattoos and personal jewellery: When you are on stage, you are not usually playing yourself, but a dramatic part. Costumes are designed to help this 'suspension of disbelief'. It is therefore a theatrical convention that, if your character would not be likely to do so, the actor should not sport visible jewellery or body art. With, for example, nose and ear studs, they can usually be removed; wedding rings if not removed can be taped over. Tattoos can be either covered – opaque tights, long sleeves, collars – or covered with make up. It is a pity when such close attention is paid to the visual aspect of a production, that the effect may be spoiled by inattention to this detail. It is recognised that everyone has the right to personal self-expression in their appearance, but on stage you are a character, not yourself.

The Prince was absolutely traditional Principal Boy, in fishnets, short shorts and soft boots under his regal jacket. It was either a good choice by the wardrobe department, or a fortuitous chance that the well fitting light purple frogged coat matched splendidly with Rapunzel's gauzy lilac dress. Her white satin and silvery accents threw back the stage lights to sparkle. The Romantic look of this full skirted costume was right for the trapped victim, and was a great contrast with Gothel's severe blood red and black colour palette. Gothel's rippling black hair was dramatic, though it sometimes obscured her facial expressions, and the greenish make up which made her look correctly ghoulishly wicked. Rapunzel's long plait was quite impressive, and it was a good idea to wrap it around her waist and loop it over a shoulder for ease of movement while keeping it in sight. The Dame's costumes were colourful and absolutely traditional with their hooped skirts, brightly coloured tights and wigs, and in a riot of striped, spotted etc fabrics. The detail of pockets with hairdressing scissors, the patched handkerchief were noticed to establish her character's role, and the make up was correctly exaggerated. Frankie's scarlet jerkin over black and white was eye-catching, and Bob and Curly's chequered tops over patched trousers and with names on their backs were right for the comedy duo and worked to make them a team. The Queen in a muted puce mediaeval style dress and the King in a stylish gold waistcoat with a jolly good crown looked suitably royal, and their Herald in a wide lapelled blue coat stood out. The Captain of the Guard seemed to have a somewhat flimsy top for the role, with a slightly odd round neck – would a collar have helped? – but we can see that, for example, military uniform headgear would have made nonsense of the hairdressing gag. Gracie and Macie in red and green were dressed as the Prince's flirts, and were able to move freely in the dance numbers. Fairy Flora's ivy strewn sparkly dress, with those glamorous boots, and the large 'P' on her bag, worked well for the probationer. The Chorus, in their conventional costume for the village scenes with flowered dresses, aprons, some in a homogenous dusky pink, others in white and bright hues, filled the stage with colour, and the uniformity of their neat braided hair, white socks and black stage shoes was right. As Gothel's minions in black with masks and glittery wing-like capes, reporters in tee-shirts with their papers' names printed, or UV ghosts with two masks each, giving them a scary look, they all looked right for each scene change – well done the Dressers! The spider with multi-coloured fairy lights adorning the legs was spooky enough for the 'Ghost Gag',

STAGE DIRECTION

It's challenging to direct and take a role on stage at the same time, and with a large youth ensemble there is also a demand for a lot of coaching as well as blocking the cast and assessing the overall appearance. The use of the new painted backdrop curtains was good for the many quick changes of location in this production, though with more practice and experimentation some transitions might be slicker, and fewer FOT scenes might be needed. In those dialogues conducted on the apron there might also have been opportunities where, as one duo exited the next scene was already coming on – there were a number of blackout pauses between dramatic episodes which might have been shortened or eliminated by using this overlap. Otherwise, all the available departure points were used to good advantage: through the audience, the hall door and the side flats on stage, to facilitate the efficient entrance and exit of the large cast. It was seen that many of the cast continued to act in character, and sometimes ad-libbing, as they departed the stage. Good practice, especially if going out through the hall where there is a longer road to travel. The Tower room set was, perhaps, only available close to performance dates giving little time to rehearse climbing in and out of the window. This was a pity because from the audience we could see the characters stepping onto or off a floor on the far side. How much comedy could have been drawn from having them slither over the edge as if they'd climbed up or were about to climb down? Except where it was hampered by a hiatus in scene changes, pace was good, and the mix of drama and comedy was nicely balanced to tell the story and retain the panto conventions. It was good to see the Junior thespians being given some characterisation in their Ensemble roles. Often 'the back row of the local panto' is the starting point for amateur stars of the future, and coaching them in diction, movement and dramatic interaction is part of the Director's role. Here it was obvious that plenty of attention and rehearsal led to some promising little performances – and to evident enjoyment of all the cast. Sound casting in the lead roles and a strong supportive production team of choreographer and backstage help gave much enjoyment to the audiences and it is clear how much fun the company had bringing this show to the stage.

MUSICAL DIRECTION and DANCE DIRECTION

When all the music consists of backing tracks it is difficult to edit songs to be slightly shorter and punchier and so here some of them did seem to go on rather too long, in view of the mixed abilities, once the initial impact had been made. A good skill to develop would be timing the dialogue to finish as the lyrics of the song start, i.e. bringing in the intro bars under the dialogue, so there isn't a long wait for the performer/s on stage. That said, it is also good practice to have a mix of upbeat dynamic numbers and softer melodic ballads and this production certainly gave us this blend with some great tunes which often furthered the narrative.

Footloose was a good, high-energy number to open the show, bringing the cast on in groups to allow each section of the Chorus – the adults and older Ensemble members and the little Juniors – their moment of introduction at the front of the stage. The Prince's *Sexy and I Know It* showed humour in the strut and wiggle, though the lyrics were a little hard to hear with their quick rapping beat. The dark minor key of *Bloody Mary* was good to introduce the wicked Gothel with her fluttering bats, and this contrasted very nicely with Rapunzel's dreamy *What a Wonderful World* though the key may not have been easy for her. *Hey Mickey* was a musical highlight, with two very good voices in Gracie and Macie and some really precise use of the fluttering autograph books

from the Junior Chorus for some snappy choreography. Dame Trixie sang *Love Machine* with clear diction to make the most of the comedy, and the good rhythm in the dance routine had the audience clapping along. The end of Act One showed varied formations in the well-drilled *Hail, Rain or Sunshine*, rolling arms and turns simple enough for all the dancers but effective en masse in the upbeat chorus, and which sensibly placed some of the youngsters sitting on the front of the stage to save room. *Starlight* opening Act Two worked better once the curtains opened on the full Chorus, but *It's Raining Men* was another showcase for some lovely voices and with great energy: the transparent umbrellas were used to advantage, and the inclusion of the parade of men was very funny. The swirling satin dance skirts enhanced the Charleston like step kicks of the routine for *Puttin' on the Ritz*, and the Walkdown to *Thunderstruck* worked well with fist pumping animation. *Firework* has a great message of 'hope for all' to end the show, though the verse melody is quite down beat, and it's only in the chorus that the vibrant energy lifts the song into a true Finale.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

A general note: Well done to all of the cast members who dealt so cleverly with the enthusiastic child who was so keen to 'help'. You managed to treat the interruptions with humour, respect and kindness, while not allowing the interventions to deflect you from the purpose of the scene and the verbal journey towards the gag or the action. That not only displays good stagecraft, but also thorough knowledge of the script for your own lines and those of the other characters in the scene. A good example of professionalism in the amateur theatre.

Rapunzel:

The role of Principal Girl is always a difficult one: there can often be little to hook on to in terms of interesting character traits to help create a dynamic performance. The part of Rapunzel, with her subservience to Gothel and then reliance on Prince Frederick is no exception. So it was great to see this actor make the most of the humour in the dialogue, and to exhibit a charming eager hesitancy as the 'new world' is revealed to her. This gave the character depth and believability. Dainty in the pastel chiffon and satin dress she exhibited rehearsed skill in arranging the long plait not to trip her (or anyone else) up. Graceful motion in dance and in general movement around the stage enhanced the role. Well done for taking on the role of choreographer as well.

Prince Frederick:

Good Principal Boy posture with front facing, hands on hips, and feet apart stance. At the beginning there was (perhaps through nerves?) lack of clear diction, but as the show progressed we heard a good speaking voice with a range of emotions. Perhaps the sulky, vain, pampered playboy was rather underplayed, but the wannabee hero was keen and eager, and won the audience's sympathy. Believable friendship with Frankie, and some good 'spoiled child' interaction with the parents.

Dame Trixie:

Plenty of relaxed confidence in this portrayal of the Dame. A lovely animated performance using a great walk, strong body language and a clear voice, perfect for a Dame. Great comic timing and good rapport with the House. Humorous interactions with other characters – particularly her crush on the Captain of the Guard – delighted the audience, and several bold falls were moments that had everyone laughing.

Frankie:

Smart looking in red tunic, black tights and boots, with tight plaits that allowed good sight of facial expressions. A good, assured stride and confident engagement with the audience, encouraging them to respond to the greeting given at each entrance. It's worth letting the audience response happen fully before telling them they were 'Great/excellent' etc. There was a bit of a tendency to swallow ends of words, possibly through knowing the lines so well! Warm energy in the physicality of this performance made the character endearing.

Gothel:

Fabulous-looking 'wicked' grandmother. The harsh black wig and the dress's colouring gave her the typical 'baddie' appearance, which was backed up by some sneering tones in her dialogue. Great combination of arrogant upright stance and crouching menace, with some glowering looks and menacing gestures. Guard against the tendency to talk upstage, but a well-managed, contemptuous manner in the "Oh yes/Oh no" gags with the audience.

Fairy Flora:

A lovely, warm friendliness in this 'Probationer' newly graduated fairy. Plenty of happy energy in movement, perhaps the flower wand could have been more deliberately wafted to generate the magic spells, but confidence in her role and eye contact with the audience was just right. Good rhythmic delivery of the traditionally rhyming lines.

Bob and Curly:

Some great physicality in the slapstick element of this 'useless assistants' duo performance, with Bob's comedy falls looking spontaneous. The 'Run and hide' ending back to back was a witty routine that played well. Sometimes the dialogue could have been pacier, but there was a lovely rapport between the two characters with each retaining their individuality, and some good energy in performance. Well done for picking up the stray goblet that others had ignored, Bob!

King Geoffrey and Queen Gertrude:

Clear projection and good characterisation showed us the change from the laissez-faire attitude of the King to a stern authoritarian who sang a mean *Puttin' on the Ritz* with the Captain, while Queen Gertrude exhibited some graceful hand movements as she danced to it. The Queen's gestures and facial expressions towards her spoiled son and, more imperiously, towards everyone else were right, though the fussy 'mother hen' could have been more pronounced, and changes in the King's vocal tone supported the frustrated monarch's desire for a more worthy successor. The cane was used with good dramatic fervour. A regal-looking pair in their coordinated outfits. Both had ringing clear voices and good projection.

Gracie and Macie:

The Prince's 'flirts' worked well together and gave their cameo roles distinctiveness in their reactions as the story unfolded. Graceful dancers with lovely singing voices, these two enhanced their musical numbers with a strong sense of rhythm and harmony.

Captain of the Guard:

Using his height to comic advantage, and sporting some highly amusing (and, we understand, real) muton chop style side whiskers, this actor took the supporting role of reluctant inamorato to the Dame and made it his own. His stride, double-take gestures and good deep voice allowed the character to come to life in a nice little cameo which clearly delighted the audience. Wonderfully comedic in stance, gesture and expression, this was a dynamic performance. Little actions of polishing kept the character real even when the focus was on others. Great singing in duet with the King.

Herald:

Lines mostly spoken clearly and with animation, and standing tall in his role of Herald to the King and Queen, this actor reacted to every line being spoken by others on the stage, and used his hands and facial expressions to bring credibility to this small part.

Chorus:

Supporting the Principals with their singing, their inclusion in the dramatic moments and some lovely enthusiasm, this Ensemble –adults and older teens to the youngest Juniors – always knew where they had to be, how to stand and how to react to the unfolding narrative. They showed energy and commitment, smiling enjoyment, and added to the visual values of the production.

ENDEAVOUR, ORIGINALITY AND ATTAINMENT

Clearly the work of a dedicated team, both on and off the stage, this was a successful collaboration and a most enjoyable pantomime. It offered both creative opportunities and an awareness of teamwork to the youngsters, and showcased some of the rich talent in the Probus Parish Players. It is heartwarming to know that performing pantomimes is a long-standing tradition that is still greatly appreciated by the community.

We enjoyed sharing with you a thoroughly entertaining evening full of laughter.

We welcome any questions or comments on the report.

Jo Nicolle (Moderating Adjudicator)

Oriel Bennett (Adjudicator)