



Society : ELODS
Production: THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS
Date : Saturday 27 April 2024
Venue : Wylllyotts Theatre

Report by : Thomas Lennon

[Show](#)

Report

General

I saw the original production at the London Palladium in 2017 with Rufus Hound, Simon Lipkin, Denise Welch and Gary Wilmot so I knew it would be an interesting addition to the amateur circuit.

Front of House

As usual at Wylllyotts, the foyer was buzzing with anticipation ahead of the performance while both raffle ticket and programme sellers were doing a brisk trade. The society, as expected, had their usual display dedicated to the show albeit on a smaller scale than witnessed at previous productions.

The welcome from committee members was very convivial as usual. It is always good to see and network with familiar faces from the district.

Programme

The society produced an A5 glossy programme comprising of 28 pages including the cover dedicated to the production with the usual content, a note from the Chair, a list of musical numbers, and biographies for the creative team and cast members.

Additional content included advertisements for other productions at Wylllyotts and St Christopher School theatres, photographs from Steve Fothergill, the introduction to NODA, a handful of generic adverts, the ELODS Past Shows list and notices for upcoming ELODS events including the Autumn production of **SISTER ACT**.

A colourful keepsake of the show for cast, creatives, crew and audiences alike from the collective talents of Rosie, Maria and Mark.

Players

John Stivey, sporting bright green hair, brought an eccentricity to his portrayal of *Toad*, the friendly trend chasing resident of Toad Hall. He had good stage presence and his previous dramatic experience was evident in his slightly over the top interpretation of the character.

Henry Martin, for me, was ideal casting for *Mole*. His effortless acting delivery teamed with a balanced vocal brought a naive timidity to his characterisation as he emerged from his underground home to embark on his voyage of discovery into the outside world.

Roger Bunnage gave us a worldly wise *Ratty* who spends most of his life on the river. He facilitates a first-time boat trip for his newfound friend *Mole* and proceeds to educate him on the evils of the inhabitants of the Wild Wood. A good performance from a seasoned professional.

Nic Corden gave a laid-back portrayal of the wise yet solitary *Badger*. He is surprised by a visit from *Ratty* and *Mole*, to convince him to help to save *Toad*. The trio set off like musketeers to try to save *Toad* from himself.

Players (continued)

Stef Carpenter as *Mrs Otter* spent the duration of the show in a state of fear wondering where her daughter was and trying to find her. A performance based around personal experience possibly.

Maddie Stoughton was a bewildered *Portia* with a habit of wandering off while looking for food to pacify her hunger with no thought for her safety despite her mother's warnings.

Mark Tobin injected a level of evil into his portrayal of *Chief Weasel*. His upright posture combined with good stage presence held him above his band of weasels and stoats as he led them in their rebellion to take Toad Hall. A good performance playing the Bad Guy for the first time.

Jude Victoria also maintained a level of evil for her characterisation of *Lesser Weasel*. She was a solid second to *Chief Weasel* within the group while also undertaking the role of Dance Captain.

Both the above players complimented each other in their respective roles and led the group competently front and centre in the '*We're Taking Over The Hall*' routine that opened Act II.

Bethany Newport clearly enjoyed her role as *Sheryl Stoat* and gave a confident performance.

Ensemble

This large cast of woodland characters were well drilled on their many entrances and exits, some of which were made through the house using both apron side access stairwells.

Harmonies for the choral work was tight from all age groups, as is usual from this group. Highlights included '*The Hedgehog's Nightmare*' and the angelic voices of the field mice in their rendition of '*Autumn*'.

Costumes

The imagination of **Nic Corden** created a wide range of costumes, each individually specific to their respective woodland creatures, which resulted in a visually pleasing set of characters well received by an appreciative audience.

The attention to detail with the accessories aided in suspending our belief in the authenticity of each species / character that unfolded before us.

Sets

The stage was pre-set with a white backcloth with several strands of fauna suspended in front of it while lit with a light green wash.

There was a main rostrum upstage, the width of the space with white stone effect steps at stage right to the main performance area. Both rostrum and tabs were all black which would have worked better had they used a woodland effect dressing or even a woodland projection on neutral tabs.

The main set pieces for Toad Hall, three columns and two large portraits proved problematic to set as they all arrived from stage left which made the setting feel laboured.

The setting of the car, made up of two pieces, also felt sluggish from stage right.

Additionally, the mention in the dialogue of a door mat and sign for Badger's abode brought attention to their absence.

Sets (*continued*)

After a visit backstage, it became obvious that the above issues were responsible solely on the lack of wing space for sets not to mention, the required stage crew. It also explained the use of the under-rostrum area on stage for storage of the rowboat and the main Toad Hall table.

Props

The provision of props was managed appropriately by **Sue Payne & Helen Wikeley** though, if I may, I would suggest finding an alternative to the use of Velcro for securing glassware on trays.

Stage Management

Frank Bundle, encouraged out of retirement for this production, ably assisted by **Rosie Cennamo** and a compact crew made best use of the staging area to create an ideal performance space for the production despite the backstage restrictions.

Lighting

John Castle designed a pleasing lighting plot which was well executed.

Sound

Peter Donaghey designed and fulfilled balanced sound levels for the performance.

Orchestra

An obviously well-rehearsed eleven-strong group of musicians, made up of reed, trumpet, trombone, violin, cello, guitar, bass, drums / percussion and piano, competently played us through this interesting Stiles & Drewe score.

Musical Director

Under the accomplished baton of **Mark Newport**, the orchestra provided the audience with an appealing interpretation of the score which had great pace and tempo.

He maintained a balance on volume levels which at no point drowned out any of the soloists while complementing the choral pieces beautifully.

Congratulations to Mark who celebrated his 75th show, over 35 years with the group, with this production.

Choreographer

Paula Bland complemented the production with a series of stylised choreography which stretched the abilities of the cross section of ages within the ensemble.

Director

John Isaac led a competent group of creatives to breathe life into this new musical version of the Kenneth Grahame tale.

Knowing the limitations backstage, he cleverly adapted his direction for the large ensemble to utilise areas of the house for group entrances / exits while smaller group scenes were well blocked / rehearsed.

In summary, an enjoyable production which was well received by an appreciative audience.

NODA Website Production Summary

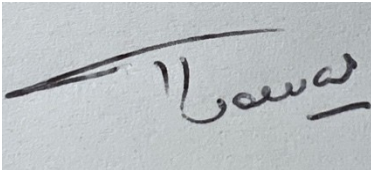
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My sincere thanks to Mark and the committee for the invitation to your Spring production. I look forward to seeing you all again at a future event.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Thomas Lennon'.

THOMAS LENNON

NODA London Regional Representative - District 7