

SUTCo Anonymous Review 2

With admittedly scant knowledge of *Into The Woods*, I was keen to see what SUPAS' latest endeavour had produced. With an all-star production team, cast, crew, and band, the expectations were high, but they more than pulled it off. From the opening, with Sam Ross as the Narrator inviting us into the production, with "Once upon a time...", I was enthralled, as the prologue played (and I can't credit the musical direction of Chris Ventom and Stephen Bache, as well as the talents of the band enough, as they were sensational) and I was swept up into the familiar narrative of fairytales such as Jack and the Beanstalk and Cinderella, with enough added twists and charm to keep it fresh and familiar. Particular praise here is needed for Ross, greeting the audience with charm and a grin, making us feel at ease as the stage was set for a spectacular show as we met our key players; Cinderella, played by Katie Kelson, Jack (of beanstalk fame) and his long-suffering mother, played by Harry Reeves and Debbie Allen, as well as their cow, played by Hannah Ellis (one of many roles she played throughout the production), and the Baker and his wife, played by Will Leggetter and Emma Dorricott, and we are invited into the woods by the charming Sydney Goodhand, playing Little Red Riding Hood.

SUPAS' usual dedication is evident from the first note, with the cast flooring us from the first song. Reeves plays a wonderfully naive and wide-eyed Jack, with *Giants in the Sky* a particular treat of his time onstage, and Allen's exasperation belying a wisdom beyond her years. Leggetter and Dorricott played a perfect married couple, their bickering, yet loving relationship evident from the first song, and the boundless energy and talent they displayed throughout the piece made them a treat to watch every time they were onstage, with Leggetter's charm and Dorricott's comedic timing a perfect balance. Kelson's talents as Cinderella as well, were a joy to behold, bringing the courageous and kind princess to life, and dealing with her domineering stepmother and wicked stepsisters, brilliantly played by Sarah Leffler, Phoebe Rhodes, and Emily Glaze, while battling a simply enormous dress throughout (hats off to the costume team of Yagmur Adalier, Natalia Grieve, and Maria MacAninch). Her chemistry and comedy with Laurence O'Brien was one of the highlights of their arc, and O'Brien and Matthew Claypole, playing the princes, deserve equal praise for their talents throughout, especially their combined comedy in both renditions of *Agony*. Claypole's relationship with Erin Stewart's Rapunzel was another treat to watch, with Stewart's incredible voice and Claypole's bumbling sweetness a brilliant contrast, with Alice Preece lingering at the fringes of their relationship as the Witch in a physically and vocally demanding role that she more than fills; she makes it her own. Finally, the previously mentioned Hannah Ellis was a delight to watch, if just to see the sheer amount of variety she managed to convey in no less than five characters, by my count, effortlessly shifting her physicality, voice, and costume throughout the play, a true demonstration of talent. I almost wish they'd given her more to do, but that may have been an exercise in sadomasochism given the amount of time she spent onstage.

A great deal of this praise, must of course go to the production team; Megan Roberts' direction shines throughout the piece, with nary a drop in energy or missed beat, the love she holds for this project is crystal clear. The variety of technical challenges (at least, that I could see) were brilliantly handled by Alexandra Parker's production managing, and Santiago Wagner-Velez's choreography shone from the opening song to the final moments of the piece, never outstaying its welcome or dragging, and yet making me wish for more after each song.

However, I can't help but feel a slight twinge at certain moments of the production; the set, while admittedly gorgeous, felt somewhat under-utilised at moments, with the upper levels being ignored during certain scenes where their usage may have opened out the performance in a more dynamic fashion. Also, despite the genuine talent felt throughout the performance, I felt certain 'magical' moments could have been made slightly more of, such as the appearance of the Giant, or Jack's ascent above the clouds. With the world they create onstage, certain moments where the onstage action doesn't line up with the dialogue do feel like there could have been more achieved with them.

Still, few productions can be tarred with the complaint of "why didn't you have a giant onstage", which typed out, does look foolish, and these quibbles could hardly stop me from having such a good time watching this show. SUPAS have elevated themselves even further than I could have imagined, and with the talent displayed in this production, I can hardly wait to see what they do next.