

*Wind in the Willows*

NKT Summer School

Kings Theatre, Newmarket

Director: Elliott Papworth

Musical Director: Joseph Hall

Choreographer: Rhiannon McBean

This new version of *Wind in the Willows* with music and lyrics by Stiles and Drewe was an extremely challenging show for the attendees of the 2019 NKT Summer School to take on and perform in eight days. It is quite a complex show which stretches all areas of the production so it meant a big learning curve for the Summer School participants both on stage and those handling the technical stuff for the first time.

The setting was impressive and I liked the idea of the few leaves scattered on the floor of the auditorium; an extra touch which extended the riverbank for the animals who entered through the audience. The costumes were intriguing but it took time to identify which animal they were in some cases, particularly the Otters. I also found the bearded swallow a bit surreal. It detracted somewhat from their song as it caused inattention in the audience. First night late cues a couple of times didn't detract from a good lighting plot. Personally I dislike spinning lights which blind the audience every few seconds. Conversely they created the required effect. Body mics were not as well controlled as they could have been. The volume on Mole's could definitely have been increased as it was very difficult to hear both dialogue or lyrics from the actor.

The music, of which there was a great deal, was very jolly but also pretty complex and much of it contains lyrics which move the story on. I thought everyone did splendidly under the Musical Direction of Joseph Hall. As is always the way some voices were better than others but everyone to my mind did extremely well. Whilst on the musical side, well done to the six extremely talented members who made up Badger's Band. RhiannonMcBean's choreography was interesting, simple and well within the capabilities of the performers.

Without an Ensemble several of the cast played multiple roles. In fact I was expecting more on stage at curtain call than there was, so well done Isabella Osborn Cherilyn Freeman, Emily Morris, Joanna Turvey and especially Jack Hadley who I felt was impressive in all five of his characters.

I also thought Archie Lea-Randall handled his role as Lesser Weasel well particularly as he needed good concentration to keep up with the Chief.

Rhiannon McBean made a very lithe baby Otter Portia making much of her on and off role interacting well in all her scenes.

As ever, Ratty, Mole and Badger are the ones who have to control Mr Toad.

Lauren Hobbs as Ratty gave an absolutely first rate performance. She has great stage presence and an excellent voice.

A fine performance too from Faye Dower as Mole who worked really well with Ratty. Lots of good work with their duets.

Oliver Squires' wonderful Shakespearean voice suited Badger well. A great characterisation.

Ryan Smith made a very enthusiastic Mr Toad, green-ily believable and full of barely suppressed energy. Not a bad voice either but just slow down the dialogue as there was a tendency to speak too quickly.

Sofia Stavrakakis was very good as Mrs Otter (and the Bargewoman) Good acting and a fine voice.

I very much enjoyed Emily Bowman's Chief Weasel. Another really good characterisation with the added bonus of a great voice.

With only eight days to bring the show together the first night went impressively smoothly. Summer School helps gain a broad experience in the skills required to deliver a convincing performance, builds teamwork and attendees form friendships which often last a lifetime. Congratulations to the class of 2019 and to those experienced people on the Management Team for ensuring amateur and possibly professional theatre has a future.

Julie Petrucci

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