

STAINES MUSICAL THEATRE GROUP

THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS – MARCH 2022

This is an enchanting musical based on Kenneth Grahame's best-selling classic of children's literature, with a book by Julian Fellowes and songs by composers and lyricists George Stiles and Anthony Drewby. .

In the opening scene and during the song 'Spring' we were introduced to a variety of woodland creatures, some cute and harmless, mice, rabbits otters and also others who proved to be rather more sinister such as weasels and foxes. The different animal groups on stage were all beautifully dressed in costumes to suit their character. The four main roles of Rat, Mole, Badger and Toad all displayed their individual characters strongly.

In the role of Toad, William Hann was excellent. He portrayed with obvious enjoyment the larger than life amphibian with an insatiable need for speed.

His son, Daniel, made a gentle Mole and carried off the large role with confidence. 'A place to come back to' was first rate.

Wesley Wooden had great charisma and made a most likeable cockney Rat.

Adding gravitas to the group of four friends was Badger played by Dan Curtis and he too gave a first class performance.

This was a wonderful company show with most of the cast taking numerous parts and I imagine that they loved having the opportunity to do that.

Glenys portrayed a motherly and caring Mrs Otter (this show was quite a Hann production!) and Robert Franck made a scary, gangster-like Chief Weasel.

I just loved the Hedgehog family played by Ian Thomas, Gail Thomas and the two children, and their song 'The Hedgehog Nightmare'.

Another highlight was Carol Martin's tap dance as a horse !

The swallows, played by Annelly, who stood in as the other swallows were ill with Covid, and Imogen, yet another member of the Hann family, performed their beautifully choreographed dance with grace – it was a delightful number and one of the many

highlights. Imogen's main role as the Gaoler's daughter provided an opportunity for the duet with Toad and also to dress her father as a woman!

None of the music was familiar to me but so most of the songs were catchy and so they seemed more familiar. One or two had a feeling of the music in 'Les Miserables', 'The Greatest Great Escape' for instance and all of the songs had the big sound of a West End musical. 'Open Road' and 'Friend is still a Friend' were super as was 'The Fight'. Vocal ability amongst the principals was high and the chorus singing was excellent.

The bridge worked well as a focal point and provided another level on stage - the woodland swipe was attractive. Toad Hall and Badger's Set were well furnished and the various forms of transport were fun, the aircraft situation was nicely handled.

T.J's stage direction was brilliant. With creative groupings and a stage full of activity there was always something interesting to watch.

Annelly James' choreography was good and the cast were confident in their movements.

Most of the scene changing was done by the cast and they worked quickly and efficiently.

Jill is to be congratulated on putting together such a captivating and imaginative set of costumes – all of which suited the characters perfectly. The coachmen's green costumes were particularly striking.

Lighting was effective and by just changing the colour of the cyclorama the atmosphere was achieved – sunlight, sunset etc. There were some good sound effects too.

I have only one less than positive comment to make but I feel I must make it, particularly as I heard other members of the audience making the same one.

Guy Bunce is clearly a talented musician but I'm afraid that the orchestra was too loud and despite the performers' diction being excellent, the underscored dialogue couldn't be heard.

It's helpful for one of the production team to be out front in order to correct any problems in that area and to ensure that the sound levels are adjusted.

And with that out of the way my congratulations to SMTG on presenting a show that would have graced a West End theatre. It was wonderful - well done!

I was sad to read about John – I'm sure his family were touched to have a production dedicated to his memory. I missed seeing him on stage.

Thank you for inviting me to see 'Wind in the Willows' and for your hospitality on the evening. Alan's playing in the Foyer, as always adds a special touch. Sorry not to have seen any of the production team this time and am looking forward to your compilation show in July which I note is at a different venue.

E. Gloria Smith
NODA S.E Regional Representative – District 12