



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

NAME OF COMPANY: **TRIPLE DARE MUSICAL THEATRE PRODUCTIONS**

NAME OF PRODUCTION: **'THE FRECKLES EFFECT'**

VENUE: The Roper Theatre, Bath

DATE: 10^h September 2016 at 2.00 pm

ADJUDICATOR: Caroline Joy

Triple Dare's "The Freckles Effect" benefitted from simple yet effective production values, polished performances and it was a perfect length for a family show.

Anne's journey was emphasised beautifully in the post-modern/abstract/art deco style paintings that were projected behind the action on stage. The paintings cleverly transformed symbolically from black and white to colourful post-impressionist depictions of Bigbury-on-Sea.

The action took place on a simple stage that contained various period appropriate props and furniture, such as a bed, chairs, suitcase, washing lines and wooden dryers with period clothing, a blackboard that read Bigbury-by-Sea 1936. A back screen depicting various images emphasised time and place, period paintings of the area, especially the more affluent housing, giving another layer to this story.

The scene changes were swift and did not interfere with the action and at times were cleverly integrated into a dance routine. All lighting and sound cues appeared well

prompted, and kudos to the efficiency and organisation of the backstage Wardrobe with the costume changes.

Neil Francis created an effective lighting design, with excellent operation and good use of spots. The lighting produced fine atmospheres and moods with amber, ruby, emerald and sapphire depicting day and night, earth, countryside and sea, as well as the complex internal emotions of the characters. These visual changes were well timed and projected. The red lighting emphasised the overall dramatic impact during the 'Danger' songs. The light looked natural for both the external and internal scenes with good distribution.

The audience appreciated the flashes of light during the storm, and one felt we were in the storm with the characters! The SFX were very good again emphasising time and place, from the old-fashioned school bell, the entrance to the Ballroom, the coastal sounds, the thunder, wind and rain. As with the lighting, the sound effects added greatly the atmosphere.

The only issues that needed to be addressed were technical. A few of the 'adults' needed to project their voices a little more. Although this occurred occasionally, the sound levels needed to be better balanced. The stronger voices were too powerful during some of the numbers and the softer voices required more support against the level of the score.

The original score by composers Matt Finch, Owain Coleman and Tom Cory, was easy on the ears, tuneful and likeable, with a few real standout songs, such as Dare I and Red Spells Danger. The musical numbers were varied, and we were introduced to heartfelt ballads to up-tempo ditty's, duets and four-part harmonies. These songs were all smartly woven into the story, by Mel Lawman, who was also the lyricist. The wide melodic and rhythmic range of the score and underscore gave the music such variation, setting the scene, mood and atmosphere, however it would have been a more rousing experience if the music was live, however one understands that this may have been impossible to arrange for The Roper. The pre-recorded music was fine, although there were times when there was sound interference or the music crackled.

Director Mel Lawman, directed with a light hand, avoiding superficial clichés, and imbued each scene with high-energy, pensiveness and infectious warmth without being over sentimental, that permeated out into the audience as one came to

understand the depth of the production. The audience and character's fondness for the red-haired orphan, contributed to the charm, humour and allure of the material for young and young at heart (nostalgic adults). And the cast went at it with poise and energy. The young actors have clearly been encouraged to immerse themselves in the 1930's and they carried themselves with a period flair.

It was most enjoyable to view the projected images of the company visiting Bigbury-on-Sea and performing at the Edinburgh Festival. These images made the performance feel even more special as it showed how the company bonded over this show. The teenagers portrayed convincing adults, the 'kids' were well directed and the interaction between the two was beautifully observed. The crew and cast used the space very effectively, with good use of entrances and exits, characterisation, sound blocking and movement, and stage business. The dialogue between the characters was well paced, clearly delivered and projected.

The streamlined version managed to incorporate most of the highlights of Anne Drew's story, however more needed to be made of the 'theft' plotline, setting up the reveal of Anne's innocence. The vignette with W was small but very significant, echoing otherness and empathy with Anne's 'outsider status', leading to her gift of a scholarship.

Although the chorus and solo songs were a lovely introduction at the beginning, perhaps time could have been utilised more effectively to flesh out this plotline. The musical was good enough to stand alone without the singing at the beginning. Scene 19 was a standout moment and you could have heard a pin drop as every single audience member was utterly captivated during "Dare We?" in the Church Hall, as the lights dimmed and the T lights lit up the stage. This was very powerful.

Choreographers, Annette Hind and Heidi Postlethwaite, created some wonderful dance routines and inspired and creative formations for the company with some amazing solos from Helena's Ballet Girl to the highly accomplished tap dancing routines by Marcus May's Mr. Stacey and various jazz routines. The choreography was expressive, exhilarating, comical and moving. Stand-out routines were to the number "Red Spells Danger" and the seated choreography during class times, with some well-choreographed routines that were performed perfectly in unison. The choreographers cleverly used the routines to investigate character and to flesh out relationships and this added another layer to the story.

Amanda Hickmore directed the large and lively talented solo numbers and chorus. The numbers were clearly projected with good pitch, resonance and fine animation of the songs. 'Filament' was well characterised by both Anne and Martha. 'Flight of Fancy' was delivered with good vocal and breath control and clear diction, with an excellent increase of tempo. The counter melodies, especially "The Inn with No Way Out", the pirate quartet was superb.

The range of harmonies throughout this musical was rousing and very mature and everyone interpreted the meaning of the words beautifully. The 'Danger' songs built and were strongly delivered. There wasn't a weak voice amongst the talented cast. The score was rather difficult, yet the cast rose to the challenge and delivered!

The period costumes fitted well and the cast really knew how to wear them, especially Mrs. Rathbourn. The costumes, hair and make-up transported us back to 1936, with flat caps, various hats, smocks, furs, tweeds, three piece suits, feminine dresses, flapper dresses, bright red lips, school uniform of the time with the straw boater hats. The costumes emphasised the characters and class structure of the time, such as the difference between the ringlets of the more upper-class schoolgirls, in contrast to the wilder hair of the lower classes, in fact Anne's hair should have its own fan site as it had a character of its own – fabulous!

The Kids

Daisy Hickmore sings, dances, and acts quite effortlessly as the firecracker Anne Drew. Her personal charm, honesty, feistiness and warmth made for a close engagement with the audience. Daisy possessed the right amount of energy and presence to hold the stage, and keep the action going.

Lucy Hind gave a star turn the balletic and shy as Helena. Not only did she move with marvelous grace, but she acted her supporting role with the confidence of a principal actor, with a fine singing voice.

Lollie McKenzie (Clara) and Phoebe Postlethwaite (Wanda) played the Rathbourn

sisters with excellent timing and characterisation. Clara was the petulant, spoiled rotten and gossipy elder sister who is used to getting her own way, and the bully of the two, who feels threatened by Anne Drew. Wanda was the weaker sibling who was easily led by her more manipulative sister.

India Purdie, Ammar Hassan, Atticus Lorenzo, Ollie Cochran, Amelia Baxter, Lexi Davies, Laily Mansourpour, Austin May, Sahara Purdie, Sophie McKenzie all exuded talent and fine stage instincts, and a sense of identity including Eddy Stone who was most convincing as Kitty's Teddy!

All the "Kids" dialogue was clear, well-modulated, and fully motivated, projecting their emotions both those suppressed as well as expressed.

The Adults

Yasmine Meaden as Martha possessed the talent of being able to both communicate and radiate complex emotions simultaneously. The scenes between Martha and Anne were very moving, especially during the number "Filament".

Caelan Sailes gave a strong and believable performance as Ralph. As pirate ghost Tom Crocker, Caelan showcased a spine-tingling talent with a rich tenor voice and a superb vocal range.

Natalie Acheson portrayed Mrs. Rathbourn with striking realism, and was such a delight to dislike! Mrs. Rathbourn's ignorance, fear and judgmental, narrow-minded opinions affected those around her and was very real in their execution. One felt sorry for her for a short while only to see her competitiveness and jealousies resurface at the end. There were some fabulous facial expressions that could burn a hole in a wall. Natalie really understood what made this character tick and clearly enjoyed inhabiting her, with fierce body language. The Red Dress routine to "Flights of fancy" was captivating and became rather humorous when the young girls start copying the routine behind her. Vocally, Natalie was a very powerful singer with a good range.

Andrew Dennis portrayed good characterisation as the, at first, rather stiff Mr. Bracken who eventually warms to Anne, with appropriate expressions and body language. Interpretation and technique were well applied during the number "I Won't

Say Sorry” as Mr. Bracken continues delivering his lecture to Anne whilst she sings her solo.

Hellie Painter as Mrs. Blewitt and Reece Fitzgerald as Mr. Blewitt offered entirely convincing performances as the overwhelmed parents of many, giving the production some great comedy moments, especially the repartee between the two. The body language, facial expressions and Devonshire accents were spot on, with some excellent method acting from Reece as an all too believable drunkard and Hellie as an exasperated Mrs. Blewitt. There was some good stage business and comic timing from the both of them as their children were running riot.

There was some great supporting talent who all gave convincing and multi-layered performances, from Tim Firmin as the rather cold and distant Mr. Rathbourn, Amy Guest as Mrs. Potherwhistle, Charlotte Chilton as Aunt Cecilie, Lara Lawman who gave a star turn as W and a stand out song and tap routine from Marcus May’s Mr. Stacey.

All the “Adults” portrayed their roles accurately, with a sense of past, with some set in their ways and some as more progressive.

This original storyline conveyed a feel good factor with a happy ending. The plot took the audience on a journey highlighting the importance of resilience, ‘family’, staying true to yourself and accepting the skin you’re in (good advice regardless of age) and these qualities should be taught more often in schools and taken into adulthood. We can all learn a lot from this fabulous, empowering and up-lifting story, which has great potential for the future and one hopes to see this musical again!

This was a very strong Production with fine ensemble playing from the Young Company. The Cast did very well with projecting the locations and the sustained characterisations, whilst keeping up the pace.

Many thanks for your kind hospitality and a most enjoyable matinee.