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Group: YESPA
Show: The Wind in the Willows
Venue: The Harlequin Theatre, Redhill
Date: 3rd August 2023
Artistic Director: Fi Kuhn-Thompson assisted by Keir Gilbert-Halladey
Musical Director: Jamie Cordell
Choreographer: Lindsay Swift

Wind in the Willows has been immensely popular since its publication in 1908. Often adapted for stage and screen; this particular version is by Julian Fellowes, with music and lyrics by George Styles and Anthony Drewe.

The first night was busy, with a packed auditorium. As usual, the administration of the foyer and auditorium was faultless.

The set was minimal, attractive and multi-level. Stage Management was precise and unobtrusive. Lighting and follow-spots were always excellent. Sound effects were clear, attractive and well-timed. Props were appropriate and used appropriately. The snow effect was...*interesting*.

What a fabulous collection of country-style costumes...and each species was beautifully co-ordinated. Take a bow, all you Wardrobe ladies. And compliments go to Make-up and Hair as well.

YESPA is fortunate to have so many unsung hero(ine)s in their Chaperones and Call Boys. Their efficiency in safely delivering so many children on time is praiseworthy.

There was a beautiful solo opening number from Portia (Amy Whittam), with good chorus and movement.

Jacob Ogle's Mole was gentle and enthusiastic, with a lovely voice. Ratty (Harry Stock) was breezy and confident as he introduced his new friend to the Riverbank and its inhabitants.

The Swallows' singing and dancing was a delightful sequence...a lovely vision.

Toad, played by Edwin Lawrence was a *tour de force* of comic movement and timing. Manic and blustering, he resembled a recent prime minister. *As if in a Dream* was a great finale to ACT I.

Jonathan Grey made a very fine Chief Weasel...evil and menacing. His singing was good and his movement fluid. He was ably assisted by Callum Cleeve (Weasely recognised) and Henrietta McArdell (Stoatally different). The rabble-rousing number *We're the Wild Wooders* was very enjoyable...well sung and with great dancing.

There was a grand, mature portrayal of Badger, by Ollie Large...both dignified and avuncular.

Mrs Hedgehog (Trixie Lawrence) and Mrs Otter (Olivia Houghton) both sang well and mustered their broods with humour and gusto.

Delilah Skyrme gave a precise, delightful performance, as the Gaoler's Daughter, dealing with Toad's idiosyncrasies whilst expertly unpacking his costume.

All this plus carolling fieldmice and a tap-dancing horse !

Everyone seemed drilled to perfection; whether they were dancing, singing, interacting or migrating in their vast hordes around the stage. The standard of solo singing was very high and chorus numbers were always precise and delightful.

Jamie Cordell's big band produced a lovely sound throughout. They gave a sensitive and versatile accompaniment to the sparky, humorous songs.

Having 60-odd children to choreograph and manoeuvre must have given Lindsay Swift a few headaches; but she produced beautiful sequences and tableaux. Arranging them all onstage at the same time was pretty impressive in itself. There was excellent use of the ensemble to represent the caravan, cars, etc.

Director, Fi Kuhn-Thompson, and Associate Director, Keir Gilbert-Halladey, have created a very good musical and coaxed wonderful performances from their young cast.

Thank you for a very enjoyable show and for your kind hospitality.

Graham Botterill