

DANCING FEET 2007

Having seen two outstanding previous performances, it was with a degree of trepidation that I attended this year's production by the Madelaine Kelly School of Dancing, again held at the magnificent Bearwood College Theatre from the 16th to the 18th March. My fears were groundless. How does this immensely talented, petite, attractive lady manage to achieve such a consistently high standard? She is a rare individual, combining dance and theatre to give performers and audiences an unforgettable experience. Let me give some awesome statistics: 36 separate, carefully programmed dance numbers involving 250 dancers aged from 3 years to pensioners, requiring over 400 handmade costumes made by a 32 strong wardrobe team. Not a hitch, glitch or missed entrance for the entire evening as each number followed seamlessly. How do you manage to do a lightning costume change with a dozen 3 year old and send them back on smiling and step perfect?

It is not possible to give more than a brief impression of an evening that provided such an eclectic range of dance. The entertainment started with '42nd Street' opening on a stage full of moving skyscrapers with 15 dancers, beautifully costumed in black, white and pink, all with great smiles and perfect movement. This was followed by 'Little April Showers' and our introduction to the 'tinies' and the 'aahh' factor which was successfully repeated throughout the evening and especially during the delightful 'Frog Song'. Through the use of vivid background images, carefully selected music played at the right level and superb costumes, the atmosphere and character of each number was immediately apparent. Congratulations to whoever made the dancing cardboard trains for the 'The Toy Shop', they were great fun! I was particularly impressed by the excerpt from 'The Phantom of the Opera' and again by the disturbing images of desert wastes, desperate lives and abducted children in a number devised by the dancers for their GCSE studies; D.A.R.F.U.R. The first half finished with 'Take the Lead' which the dancers had performed at Sadler's Wells as part of the Mardi Gras dance competition. Hip Hop, Tap, Flamenco and Jive were combined to produce stunning images which had the audience shouting for more.

And we got more! The second half was even better. Starting with the ethereal and calming 'Excerpt from Penguin Café', followed by a joyous 'I'm Alive'. It would be unchivalrous to guess the average age of the tap dancers in 'Thoroughly Modern Millie' but I do know that Wendy Roberts's teenage granddaughter was performing in the show and Linda Daman had three daughters in many of the numbers. Age is no barrier to talent and the silver clad hoofers gave us formation tap dancing worthy of Busby Berkeley! The number 'My heart will go on' was very moving with just the right amount of Irish sentimentality befitting Saint Patrick's Day. We had stunning tap and flawless cartwheels in 'Footloose' held together by a lovely Josie Daman smile. What is the least self conscious age? I think it is around 8 years old and this was apparent in the well choreographed 'Mazurka'. Sultry Cuban images were well captured by some of the older girls in 'Let's Get Loud' with the slinky number 'Sway' with lovely figure hugging fringed dresses.

It would be impossible to mention all of the outstanding dancers by name but I was charmed by the talented Hannah Scott and the experienced Rosie Roberts. Where were the boys? Only 6 out of 250 was disappointing but we were treated to two wonderful excerpts from 'Swan Lake' performed by the very talented Sam Brown who was appearing by kind permission of the Elmhurst School of Dance where he is a full time student. The experienced Tom Pepper gave a number of witty, virtuoso performances.

It had to end, and what an ending with many of the Company in 'A New World' which used the Irish Jig to underpin a great dance medley, culminating in a lovely piece of theatre as Madelaine Kelly and assistants, Michelle Bolwell, Tonia Green and Katie Joyce danced on to the stage, to great applause from the audience. The proceeds from the four performances will all go to the NSPCC with a special donation to the Elmhurst School of Dance.

Joe Haynes