



Fops but no flops in Silchester Players' *Little Red Riding Hood*, running all this week

Full moon does funny things in Pantovia

Pantomime

Silchester Players: Little Red Riding Hood, at Silchester Village Hall, on Friday, January 29, Saturday, January 30, Friday, January 5 and Saturday, February 6

I THOUGHT I knew most of the usual pantomime storylines pretty well, but this was definitely the first time I had seen the principal boy turn into a werewolf.

Paul Reakes' script for *Little Red Riding Hood*, staged by Silchester Players, gave a refreshing and highly-original twist to the fairytale. What's more, the werewolf was none other than Prince Rupert, ruler of Pantovia, and his nocturnal predicament offered the perfect excuse for his arch-opponent the Count de Cash (played to foppish perfection by Alan Moorhouse) to remove him from power for good. He was assisted in his evil plans by the fact that Pantovia "for the benefit of the plot" experienced full moons on consecutive nights.

Thankfully, the Count hadn't bargained on the wolf-loving villagers, who quickly acted to protect their young ruler.

The script offered scope for some very interesting characters, and director Tim Oliver and producer Sarah Oliver cast them well. Tony Oliver gave a fine dead-pan performance as the bowler-hatted Sternum, Janice Garrard was delightful as the reluctantly single Gertrude, while Ian Hartwell as Dame Roxie Rumpel and Alec Burrell as son Reggie worked the audience with confidence and enthusiasm – the audience aerobics were a nice touch.

Brian Gillett and Clive Solomons as Cringe and Cower were in good comic form as the Count's less-than-loyal henchmen and Stacey Warner brought a touch of Catherine Tate to her portrayal of Grannie.

Laura Whiteway gave a good performance with some strong vocals as the lovesick Rosie, while Jade Saunders was well cast as the hapless prince (not forgetting his slightly scary alter ego Robbie Nicholson as the wolf – nice trick with the hankie).

The principals were well supported by the players' large and lively adult and junior choruses (choreographed by Trevor Dobson and Kim Schenklaar respectively), and the juniors' ultra-violent dance in the woods was definitely one of the highlights of the show.

Good lighting and a vibrant set added to the enjoyment of the evening. Well done all.

MARK LILLYCROP

To check the availability of tickets, priced £7 adults and £5 concessions, telephone Beryl Oliver on (01189) 815600.

The madness of war

Tension in the officers dugout as time ticks towards a terrible consequence

R.C. SHERRIFF'S First World War drama was first performed in 1928, 10 years after the war ended and the nation was still reeling from the loss of so many of its young men. In The Original Theatre Company's and Icarus Theatre Collective production at The Haymarket Theatre we are immersed in this compelling account of warfare.

Victoria Spearing's set perfectly evoked the rat-infested officers' trench near St Quentin, filled with the detritus of war as the occupants try to bring some form of normality to the horrors they faced.

There is a disturbing routine to their lives. Stanhope the officer in charge, strongly played by Christopher Harper, is an ex-public school boy; former captain of the first 11 at school and trying to set an example to his fellow men. He is disillusioned and tired with the war and copes by drinking copious amounts of whisky. His fellow officers are an eclectic collection of characters from pipe-smoking schoolmaster Lieutenant Osborne, known as uncle, a thoroughly convincing performance from Graham Seed who reads *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in order to

Theatre

Journey's End, at The Haymarket, Basingstoke, from Tuesday, January 26 to Saturday, January 30

remain sane; to Hibbert (Rhys King) who is trying to buy his ticket home to Blighty through feigning illness. By contrast Trotter (Gareth Davies) is the stoical officer counting the days on a chart and ensuring he is well fed and writing letters home.

Upsetting the equilibrium is the arrival of the young innocent and naive Raleigh (Tom Hackney), who attended public school with Stanhope and hero worships him, but discovers that he has changed dramatically.

...this was a thought-provoking evening that makes a passionate case about the horrors of war

Knight Mantell is the dithering Colonel, anxious to achieve a victory in the push forward, while Adam Best is the 'salt of the earth', Mason who cooks for the officers, bringing a welcome touch of humour to the play. Zac Holton is splendid as the stoic Sergeant Major rallying the troops to face the horrors of going 'over the top'.

Time is almost at a standstill as everyone waits for the attack and the tension created is truly palpable. The ending is heart-wrenching as the inevitable tragic climax is played out.

Directed with clarity by Alastair Whatley this was a thought-provoking evening that makes a passionate case about the horrors of war. Highly recommended.

ROBIN STRAPP

□ *JOURNEY'S END* tours to *The Hexagon, Reading*, on Tuesday and Wednesday. For further details, telephone Reading Arts box office on (01189) 606060.

You can also catch it at the *Wilde Theatre at South Hill Park arts centre, Bracknell (March 17 - 20)*, and *Theatre Royal Winchester on March 31*, telephone (01962) 840440.



Ekaterina Murugova and Sergey Smirnov as Royal Geese Fua and Gras

World class and twice as nice

Theatre

Snow White on Ice, at New Theatre Oxford, from Monday, January 25 to Sunday, January 31

IT took us quite some time and not a little disputing to work out how long it was since we had last seen *Snow White on Ice* by the Russian Ice Stars. She thought it was last year, me the one before.

In the end, my 15-year-old daughter and I were both amazed to discover that it was four whole years since the show first glided on to the stage with a wonderful original score by Silvio Amato and direction and choreography by Giuseppe Arena.

We both loved it first time round, unfamiliar as we were then with the sheer professionalism of this world-class troupe of skaters and, unprepared for their sharp intake of breath-inducing acrobatic acts, we were on our feet with the rest of audience as the flash, bang, firework of a finale brought the house down.

So how had the production fared over the intervening years, and, perhaps, more to the point, how had we? My enthusiastic skating 11-year-old was now a 'whatever' 15-year-old party-going teenager and I had been lucky enough to see the Russian Ice Stars on more than a few occasions since and now knew well enough what tricks they could pull.

However, I can report that, if anything, we enjoyed this production more than we had first time round. There may be less of the startling whizz and bang (although the witch still keeps changing into a queen in a flash and a puff of smoke), but the quality of the skating seems to have been honed and refined to a level that can keep everyone on the edge of their seats with its sheer brilliance.

There was still the skill of the aerial gymnasts and the multiple hula-hooping abilities of the Arabian dancers to marvel at and admire, the cleverly quirky and comical dancing of the seven woodcutters (definitely no dwarves, these fellas – indeed one could almost qualify as a giant) and fowl antics and amusing costumes of the royal geese, but – and I speak for both of us here – this time we were wowed by the sheer artistry and prowess of international skating champion Irina Tkachuk as Snow White and her various partners.

This performance may have lost its razzmatazz of a finale, but it came to an end with such elan and superb figure, pairs and ensemble skating, that this was more than enough for you to feel that you had got your money's worth. As they say, sometimes less is more.

Snow White on Ice comes to the Wyvern theatre, Swindon, on May 3 and The Hexagon, Reading, on May 10. For times and prices and availability visit www.snowwhiteonice.com

CAROLE ELGUETA



Journey's End, currently touring the region