

The Little Mermaid JR

Viva (Junior Youth Section)

St Andrew's Church Soham

Directors: Ben Clark & Lee Sherwood

Musical Director: Gemma Perry

Choreographer: Louise Plummer

Assistant Choreographer: Jodie Nunn.

When I was asked to review Viva's junior youth performance of the Walt Disney classic "The Little Mermaid", I accepted without hesitation. I happen to be a great fan of Disney but have never so far seen 1) *The Little Mermaid* or 2) Viva's Junior Youth Section (5-15 year olds) in their very own show.

For those, like me, unfamiliar with the film, I'll give you a quick overview. The story is of a beautiful young mermaid Princess Ariel, who longs to leave her father King Triton's underwater kingdom. On one of her trips to the human world above, she saves the handsome young prince Eric from drowning, he is enchanted by her lovely voice and is determined to seek her out and claim her as his bride. Ariel has to make a deal with the wicked sea witch, Ursula, forfeiting her voice for the chance to become human for three days and find her prince and, as in all good fairy tales, good triumphs over evil in the end.

As always with a Viva production, this time with St Andrew's Church Soham as their venue, the set design was excellent (credit to OLIVER ELLERTON ELLIE BOVINGDON and JODIE NUNN). Great effort was made to create an under-the-sea look on the unusual shape acting space, and set design coupled with excellent large props achieved it well (great boat by the way). The radio controlled shark (or should I say at times uncontrolled shark?) generated much amusement before curtain up and in the interval - a nice touch.

Lighting design was well done and the backstage team did a good job of hiding in plain sight with simple but well planned set changes. Music, I think, was all on backing track, which worked nicely throughout, but was, for me, overloud which meant we missed some of the dialogue. Credit to the cast, and the efforts of MD GEMMA PERRY, that they all seemed to know the tracks very well. The chorus work was well rehearsed and choreographed, it was lovely to see that even the youngest cast members knew all the words and the dance moves. I have to say the costumes looked terrific and I doff my cap to the costume design team. The make-up design by AILSING O'RIELLY was super complimenting the costumes and not overdone on the young actors.

There are some great parts in 'The Little Mermaid' such as Sebastian the Crab, Scuttle the Seagull and Flounder the...Flounder. As the self-proclaimed expert on 'human stuff' (particularly dingle hoppers), ALEX BURNS gave a very good performance indeed. He put the comedy of the part across well. He also sang nicely, and was well backed up by his fellow gulls, HOLLY PRYKE, SIOBHAN FORDHAM and TABBIE KIRK.

SIENNA WARDER Flounder, who I loved, was small, confident and talented. She gave an extremely accomplished performance as the loyal, yet cowardly, Flounder. I was most impressed with the way she handled herself singing against the Mersisters, (ZARA MINNS, IZZY AVEY-WALTRERS, SUMMER DOWLING, LOLA MACDONALD, LILY MCMAHON, ABBEY CORNWELL), in 'She's in Love'.

KIERA O'REILLY as Sebastian was brilliant. Kiera has a great feel for comedy, her delivery and timing were excellent. This was a fine performance.

As seems to be traditional in a Disney Princess story, the Prince is not afforded much of a character and only really exists as vehicle for the Princess' story to progress. That said, ALFIE PECKHAM gave a tidy performance in this role, although having a tendency to deliver lines too fast vocally he was very strong. He was ably supported by DANIEL ALLGOOD as Grimsby.

A youth production always throws up difficulties for youngsters of a similar age playing a parent but I thought that ISAAC STARES gave a good performance as King Triton, managing to wield a strong hand over his feisty daughter.

Ariel, The Little Mermaid herself was very well played by MACEY BENNETT 'Part of Your World' was nicely delivered, and she performed equally well in the second half of the show when she was unable to speak or sing and had to communicate through mime.

I reserve my final praise for LIZI NICHOLSON who was perfectly cast as Ursula, who commanded the action every time she appeared. With evil eels, Flotsam and Jetsom (well portrayed by MEGAN GODFREY and CAITLIN EATON), in tow, she looked excellent in costume and make-up, and appeared in total control of all of her scenes. I was most impressed too with her vocal performance.

One criticism I have is that in Ursula's "big scene" when she takes Ariel's voice, she was performing from the balcony at the back of the church. Yes, it sounded impressive but for the audience there were two choices: turning round completely to appreciate Lizi's performance or watch what was happening to Ariel on stage. I think most people watched the stage which was a shame as this was one of the most powerful scenes in the show.

I am sorry I cannot name every one in the cast because everyone is deserving of praise. All principals were good and there was some first-rate singing and dancing by the ensemble. Certainly the excellent choreography devised by LOUISE PLUMMER and assistant choreographer JODIE NUNN was done full justice to by the young dancers.

Directors BEN CLARK and LEE SHERWOOD had their hands full with this cast of over seventy but well done to them as they all acquitted themselves very well, with good singing, movement and obvious enjoyment. I can honestly say all your hard work paid off with a most pleasurable and engaging show.

This was one of those occasions when I had a smile on my face all the way through - it really was a delightful production.

Julie Petrucci

Regional Representative NODA East District Four South