



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : NOMADS  
Production : Shrek  
Date : 07/10/2023  
Venue : The Corn Exchange, Newbury  
Reviewer : Cate Naylor

---

## Show Report

I was delighted to be invited to review Shrek the Musical and to join some of the production team and friends of NOMADS at the drink's reception before the show. It was a joy to see so many people on stage, clearly having a great time performing this family favourite.

**Neil Harvey** (Shrek) played Shrek brilliantly portraying all the different layers of the character. Initially self-absorbed and antisocial with some monstrous and scary ogre traits thrown in as he railed at the fairy tale characters when they were moved into the swamp. Then, when he fell for Fiona and finally 'got the girl', he showed a softer and more excited boyish side to his character. Neil was rarely off stage but kept his energy throughout, coping well with his heavy costume, prosthetics, and large ogre hands. He gave a great visual performance backed up with a soft lilting Scottish accent which didn't dip for the whole show. Neil sang well with a rich resonant voice. 'When Words Fail' and 'Build a Wall' were an absolute delight and he brought out his comedic side in 'I Think I've got you Beat' with Fiona. Overall, this was a demanding role and Neil smashed it!

**Pete Warbis** (Donkey) gave a superb performance and was bounding with energy and exuberance as the excitable, smart talking lovable donkey. He had Donkey's quirky character throughout but also showed his sensitive and honest traits. He had good chemistry with Shrek and clearly portrayed donkey's development into a true friend with a good heart. Pete had great comic timing and his actions and reactions, and dynamic physicality added to his performance. Donkey chats non-stop and Pete maintained the clarity of the delivery of his quick-fire lines brilliantly. He had a good, strong singing voice and delivered his songs perfectly in character I particularly enjoyed his performance of "Don't Let Me Go".

**Hannah Maskell** (Princess Fiona) gave a brilliant performance, and it was hard to believe that this was her first lead role! She portrayed Fiona with confidence, deftly moving between moments of frustration, excitement, and despair, then finally happiness. She had good characterisation, and her Fiona was independent, strong-willed, and slightly cooky. She maintained her American accent throughout, singing with assurance in all her songs and always keeping in character. Hannah demonstrated superb vocal control over a wide range and was extremely expressive with moments of power contrasted with a warm tender tone in 'Morning Person' and 'This is Our Story'. The duet between her and Shrek of 'I Think I Got You Beat' was a great comedy moment.

**Stuart Honey** (Lord Farquaad) was outstanding. He had a great character and was very funny. This was a very demanding role physically as he performed the whole show on his knees which must have been difficult, but he did it so naturally that I forgot that he wasn't actually that short. He had brilliant comic timing with some lovely facial expressions and reactions and was in character the whole time even when not the centre of attention. Stuart captured Lord Farquaad's arrogance, pomposity, and greed really well, but also endeared the character to the audience such that I was almost sorry to see him eaten by the dragon at the end!

**Nicky Rands** (Gingy) mastered the gingerbread puppet and voice well, co-ordinating the mouth movement with her lines perfectly and interacting well with the other characters. She was clearly struggling with a croaky throat at the performance I saw, but despite this delivered her song lines with good tuning and character.

**Anna Neary** (Pinnocchio) excellently portrayed Pinnocchio's character with accurately whiney and high-pitched vocals which were very authentic for the part. She was always engaging and in character and sang her solo lines well.

**Caitlyn Maskell** (Dragon) had excellent stage presence and was menacing in her posture, expressions, and movement. She had a lovely voice, which was rich and tuneful with well controlled and expressive dynamics. The interaction between her and the three dragon handlers worked very well with them all mirroring each other's movement.

**Poppy Franklin-Wilson** (teen Fiona) and **Amelia Ellis-Cosgrove** (young Fiona) both sang superbly in the trio in “I Know it’s Today” with their voices balancing well with each other and with adult Fionas. They were beautifully in tune and really acted the song. Amelia did an excellent job as young Fiona, confidently starting the trio and holding her own with the two older actresses.

**Hector Rands** (Young Shrek) despite having no lines, this young actor made a very cute young ogre and had lots of character in his movements and interaction with his parents, looking suitably dejected as they banished him.

**Alison Hoult** (Mama Ogre) and **Scott Taylor** (Papa Ogre) Opening the show, these two were perfect as the somewhat uncaring parents of Shrek; deliciously cruel, with relish written all over their faces. With characterful gestures, good comic timing and clever intonation in ‘Big Bright Beautiful World’, they made the explanation of why Shrek had to leave home at 7 sad but amusing. They both had strong vocals and lovely harmonies and their energy set the pace for the show.

**Grace Green** (Queen Lillian) **Joseph Knight** (King Harold) also worked well together as they in turn in a slightly more serious manner explained to young Fiona that she was to go and live in a tower far away from everyone. Together, they joined to sing the second part of ‘Big Bright Beautiful World’.

### **Fairy Tale Creatures**

**Aliarna Black** (Baby Bear), **Shaun Blake** (pig 2), **Naomi Burns** (Peter Pan), **Matt Collins** (Pig 1), **Pam Honey** (Elf), **Coral Joice** (Mama Bear), **Justine Kelly** (Guard), **Holly Lucas** (Blind Mice), **Robynne Meager** (Tweedle Dee) **Jane Oliver** (Blind Mice), **Alice Parker** (Sugar Plum Fairy), **Andy Pocock** (Wolf), **Susanna Sales** (White Rabbit), **Victor Santos** (Pig 3), **David Seamons** (Papa Bear), **Sharon Seamons** (Ugly Duckling) **Fiona Sinsbury** (Blind Mice), **Carly Thompson** (Fairy Godmother), **Freya Wilson** (Wicked Witch)

The stage was packed with a wonderful group of all our favourite fairy tale characters with all these actors working together as a cohesive group and each performer playing their own fairy tale role with energy. They had all developed the characterisation of their role with engaging physicality, movement and gestures that fitted their fairy tale creature perfectly. They sang well as a group with several of

the ensemble having a step forward solos in 'Story of my Life' and 'Let your Freak Flag Fly' giving more of the group the opportunity to take centre stage. All the cast had mastered the group choreography and it really lifted the group numbers.

### **Ensemble**

**Kate Brown** (Pied Piper), **Karen Fakes** (Rat), **Michelle Godfrey** (Rat), **Karin Graham** (Guard), **Paula Hart** (Guard), **Taya Hutchings** (Tinker Bell), **Hazel Inman** (Guard), **Daniel Maskell** (Grumpy), **Matt Sparkes** (Captain of the Guards), **Emily Tanner** (Rat), **Scott Taylor**, **Danielle Watson** (Rat), **Anthony Whitaker** (Knight)

In their identical armour and head gear, the guards of Dulac co-ordinated their movements brilliantly adding humour to the 'Court' of Lord Farquaard. **Matt Sparkes** as the Captain of the guards deserves a special mention for his comical facial expressions and reactions to Farquaard's demands.

As rats they mastered the energetic choreography as they ran from the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

This group performed well together as an ensemble and looked like they were having a great time.

### **Creatives**

**Amanda Maskell** (Director) assisted by **Daniel Maskell and Eleanor Russell**. Bringing Shrek, this hugely popular family favourite to the stage and working with such a large cast is no mean feat, but Amanda and her team certainly pulled it off. It was clear that Amanda had worked hard with the cast, and they all pulled together as a team with lots of energy and good interactions. She had developed the characterisation of the lead actors to create believable performances with lots of interest and light and shade in their performances. Every scene was slick, and every change of scene practiced to perfection. All the cast must be congratulated for bringing this spectacular production to the stage, as it is a team effort but managing the team and giving them the freedom to develop their collective performances is an skill in itself, well done!

**Richard George** (Producer) assisted by **Hannah Maskell** This was such a complex production with very many strands and teams needing to be fitted together and, I am sure that Amanda was glad to have the skills of Richard and Hannah to assist her in managing the production and large cast.

**Alison Hoult** (Choreographer) The style of the choreography was original and really added to the humour and visuals. The Duloc routines especially were so cleverly designed with the whole cast of guards and citizens in perfect sync with each other. The choreography in general worked well to compliment the songs and the principles, fairy tale characters and ensemble had mastered all the dances performing them with energy and enthusiasm.

**Nic Cope** (Musical Director) assisted by **Jevan Johnson-Booth** had done a good job working on the many songs with the lead principals and ensemble and the quality of the singing and harmony was outstanding. Every one of the musical numbers had been well developed and this accomplished cast gave splendid performances.

Nic also led the impressive 15-piece band on the night, and their accompaniment was excellent giving great support to the performers and complementing the singers very well. The music was very well balanced, never overpowering the singers and I am sure that this cast thoroughly enjoyed and benefited from having a live band accompany them.

**Michael Brenkley** (Lighting Design) The lighting plot was excellent with some very effective lighting. Michael had designed the lighting to create different atmospheres and to enhance the action with a range of coloured lighting effects which were used to depict the different moods and locations. Lighting was well run on the night with every scene layered with colour and texture aiding the story telling beautifully. The dragon's cave and eerie ogre lighting were particularly effective and the stage in the day-time scenes was well lit with no areas in shadow.

**The Corn Exchange** (Sound Design and Operation) The sound cues were spot on and the sound effects in the song "I think You Got Me Beat" were perfectly timed. The blend and balance between band and cast was excellent and very well implemented throughout. I was pleased to see that mics were used which is so important in a modern musical when a large live band is accompanying, meaning that the singers can be heard by the audience and they do not need to strain.

**Chris Rands** (Stage Manager) assisted by **Neil Padgen** (Assistant Stage manager) and **Quentin Kerry, Clare Stubbs, Emily Browne, Jeff Burton, Joe Williamson, Matt Percy, Rhys Swan, Russell Barrett, and Tony Jones**

Back-stage was managed very effectively, and the stage manager and the crew were slick and unobtrusive in the set and scene changes. I was very impressed by how quickly and smoothly the changes of back drops and set pieces were moved, never impeding the action on stage, or distracting to the audience. The stage manager also ensured that the wings were kept clear to enable the large cast to enter and exit the stage quickly and smoothly. Well done on a disciplined and professionally run production.

**UK Productions** (Set design) The set was very well designed and provided an excellent backdrop for all the many comings and goings of the cast in their different locations. Visually, it was colourful, and imaginative and really helped layer the piece and enhance location and characterisation from the offset.

**Alison Taylor** (Wardrobe Mistress) **Charades Theatrical Costumes** (costumes and wigs) The costumes and wigs which had been hired in were excellent and beautifully done. Shrek, Lord Farquaard and Donkey were particularly splendid, and the three versions of Fiona all in the same green dresses worked well together. The Fairy tale characters, the guards and the Duloc Dancers were a splash of colour and added to the spectacle of the ensemble. It must have been quite an undertaking for Alison the Wardrobe Mistress to ensure that everyone had the right costume at the right time and to support the quick costume changes when they were needed.

There were many wigs for the Duloc Guards, the Duloc Dancers and the various fairy tale characters which were effective and added colour and interest to the costumes.

**Taylor George, Chrissie Watson-Taylor and Esme Harvey** (Make-up) **Rebecca Cawthra** (Prosthetic Supplier)

The make-up was excellent and well applied. It must have been quite a challenge managing the make up for such a large cast and for transforming Princess Fiona into a green ogre in such a short space of time. Shrek's make up and prosthetics were super and very close to the film original.

**Lesley Kerry** (Properties) assisted by **Colette Jones and Rachel Bowley** (Properties Crew)

The set dressings were well chosen and appropriate, and the large number of props were amazing. Both the Farquaad's life sized white horse and the Dragon puppet were impressive, but the huge range of the smaller props were also effective. The exploding bird brought a gasp and laughter from the audience and Pinocchio's expanding and shrinking nose was a good effect.

**Collette Jones, Tony Jones, Emma Percy and Sam Ellis-Cosgrove** (Chaperones) With young children in the cast, the chaperones did a good job ensuring that they were always supervised and safe as they entered and exited the stage.

**Hannah Maskell** (Programme) This was a very informative programme with a useful synopsis and background information on the story of Shrek, as well as a complete song list. I liked that all the cast had their photograph included and that biography's for the principles and production team were included.

Well done on bringing this production which was filled with fun, exuberance, and many memorable performances to the stage. Overall, the success of the show was summed up perfectly by the audience reaction at the end... applause and a 'standing ovation'... well done everyone for your brilliant show! I look forward to joining you again next year!

*Cate*

Cate Naylor

NODA London District 13 Representative.