

THE WIZARD OF OZ, 2004



All your favourite characters from The Wizard of Oz will be taking to the stage next week. Deadlinepix CG2559-A

THEATRE SPOTLIGHT:

Gareth Foreman finds out more about the Teddington Theatre Club's production of the family classic *The Wizard of Oz* which comes to the Hampton Hill Playhouse next week.

The Wizard of Oz is as much a part of Christmas as turkey and tinsel, and this year the Teddington Theatre Club are heading over the rainbow for their Yuletide production.

There is a storm blowing over Kansas. Dorothy and her trusty sidekick, Toto, take refuge in the cellar of her aunt's house.

But when she wakes up and realises the storm has passed, Dorothy finds herself in a strange land inhabited by munchkins who tell her the only hope she has of getting back to Kansas is by following the yellow brick road and getting the Wizard of Oz to help her.

On her travels Dorothy meets up with a scarecrow who wants a brain, a lion who wants some courage and a tin-man who wants a heart. Together they set off in search of the wizard, but the wicked witch of the west is determined to stop them.

Dealing with a cast of 34 and a dog is director Michelle Hood, whose approach to the Wizard of Oz is positively Homeric.

"It is all about searching for something but then realising what you are looking for is at home all the time," said Michell.

"Like Odysseus, he spent years travelling the seas in search of something yet all the

Guardian

Charming story and wonderful score

Richmond Drama Awards

Derek Johnson

TEDDINGTON Theatre Club presented their Christmas production last week.

Can there be anyone who does not know the story of **The Wizard of Oz**, either from the books or from the classic MGM movie? I have not seen this adaptation before; Kane's adaptation is closer to the movie than L Frank Baum's 1964 libretto but for me the new elements have nothing like the comic potential of some of the scenes which have gone; the spinning bridge for example. However, it is still a charming story and we still have Arlen and Harburg's wonderful score.

The four main roles are, of course, the stuff of legend which daunting task fell to Sophie MacKrell as Dorothy, Elizabeth Lattimore as Scarecrow, David Dadswell as Tinman and David Hannigan as Lion.

Here was good ensemble playing from four very engaging actors who took us nicely though the evening. I must admit to a feeling of foreboding at the prospect of a female scarecrow but Elizabeth Lattimore won me over completely with a good singing voice, easy movement and a permanent twinkle in

her eye, she touched just the right note.

There were nice cameos, too, from Susanne Tunnicliff as Glinda /Aunt Em and from TTC veterans Charles A Halford as Uncle Henry/Guard; Barry Hill as Professor Marvel and the Wizard himself and Sue Bell, terrifying as The Wicked Witch of the West and even more chilling as Miss Gulch who wants to have Dorothy's dog, Toto, put down. Toto was played in Kansas by Bean or Mango, according to which performance one saw, and in Oz by eight year old Chester McKee; I still can't decide which of the two was better at upstaging the rest of the cast.

Enthusiastic support came from a handful of adults and a large selection of children of all ages. Discipline among the youngsters was not strong but that did not seem to worry the audience on the night. With just a four piece in the pit it was difficult to do justice to such a full blooded score and I wonder if two pianos might have provided more drive.

This show is a mammoth undertaking and Director Michelle Hood must be congratulated on marshalling her troops, of all ages and experience, into a coherent two hour entertainment: it cannot be denied that, judging by the warmth of their applause at the end, the audience had enjoyed their evening immensely.