

## BLODS

Elf the Musical

De la Warr Pavilion Bexhill

Friday 23rd December 2022

Director: Henri Hayler

MD: Lesley Van Egmond

Choreographer: Abby Baines

I considered 'Shrek' performed last year to be an outstanding production but last evening's magical performance was just the perfect way to start our festive holiday and I really didn't mind a bit getting a soaking to get back to my car which was way along the seafront – the theatre car park being full! From the moment I arrived at the foyer doors the buzz was exciting and at the end there was certainly enough belief to keep Santa flying high.

A funny, family festive magical candy cane musical with Santa telling us the story of Buddy the Elf who really was a human that had landed in Santa's sack as a babe who was brought up at the North Pole. He has grown too big and is hopeless as a toymaker and now is the time to discover the truth about himself. Santa gives him permission to find his birth father Walter Hobbs, to discover his real identity and immediately is rejected. Buddy falls head over heels for store elf Jovie who is really not a Christmas lover. Meanwhile dominant Mrs Greenway is waiting for a new storyline and the executives are struggling for ideas. With the help of Buddy and his story eventually all are converted when Emily Hobbs and young Michael Hobbs witness Santa with his reindeer flying across the night sky! Finally, Buddy is accepted, and New York celebrates the wonder of Christmas.

The A4 colourful programme was well constructed by Maisie Weston Marketing Manager. It was interesting, had a full-page NODA descriptor, Christmas decorations, good cast photos and I really liked 'My Favourite Things' about the festive season, a word game and a great PR inclusion of the next production for the Summer – 'School of Rock' and of course the numerous thank-yous to the many volunteers involved to produce such a first-class show.

Based on the film written by David Berenbaum with book by Meehan & Martin, music by Matthew Sklar and lyrics written by Chad Beguelin this script ran with ease and comic timing with musical items a joy to listen to. Lesley ran a tight ship and with her MDing skills, there was clarity, energy, and good harmony throughout. I particularly enjoyed the 'Sparklejolly twinklejingley'! Lovely duets and solo work and the four musicians sounded like a full orchestra.

The choreography was devised by Abby Baines - last seen as a Donkey in 'Shrek' a somewhat different role - and exciting moves were executed with precision by the nine talented dancers, with the leads and ensemble also at ease with synchronised movement. Scurrying movement by the Elves on their knees was wonderful. The cast also showed us they were adept roller dancers! A notable Santa number was well sung by the men ensemble all resplendent in their bright red Santa costumes.

Sets were again provided by Scenic Projects together with BLODS Properties. The many scene changes were professionally managed by the SM and crew and particularly effective was the combination of the set pieces together with back projections. Sound and lighting design and operation worked a treat with special snow blow, dry ice effects and colour spots on the audience. The most amazing surprise of all was in the finale when Santa's sleigh took to the skies – a superb remote-controlled piece of kit with Michael Woodhams wishing us all Merry Christmas – a perfect great ending.

DS Costume Hire and the three ladies of the wardrobe must be congratulated for the wonderful colourful magical costumes provided throughout. The lead roles were well cast with Christopher Lavender – his first role as leading man as the loveable Buddy in fine voice and well-timed comedy as well as pulling heart strings, playing with great confidence using the whole stage and extension with ease and well supported by delightful Becky Jeffs as Jovie – her first principal part with the company. An Explosive Walter Hobbs was solidly played by David Baxter, his wife Emily was Ita Wise and sang a superb duet with young Alfie Ward-James their son Michael. Incredibly good characters were created by the support roles and Mick Woodhams was the magic storyteller Santa with a great touch of comedy. This was a huge team effort from all performers and all those behind the scenes too, with Henri taking on the mammoth role of direction in creating a most successful Christmas production.

A précised version will be posted on the NODA website for the company very soon.

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