

ARTS NEWS AND REVIEWS

# A love story of star quality



■ Gareth Warner as Oenamaus with storyteller Alisa McCaughrean

Ref: 31-8420C

**Boxford Masques: The Seven Stars, from Wednesday, July 28 to Saturday, August 1**

I HAVE reviewed plays in many venues, including a public toilet in Edinburgh, but the stunning panoramic views on top of Hoar's Hill above Boxford provided the most idyllic venue for the Boxford Masques' adaptation of *The Seven Stars*, written by Charlotte Peake and adapted with immense skill by Geraldine McCaughrean and Ade Morris.

As you climbed the hill there was a wonderful atmosphere with folk picnicking on the grass and all the vibes that this was going to be a special performance – and it certainly was.

Designer Libby Watson's set was enchanting: under the spread of a beautiful beach tree different globes representing the planets were suspended, with a sweeping ramp from the tree to the floor with silver drums creating a perfect amphitheatre. I took my seat on a log; others were sitting on hay bales or had brought their own seats. The atmosphere was magical.

The play is essentially a love story. In a distant

corner of the night sky, the Seven Stars spend their time dancing and telling each other stories and worshipping the cold-hearted Artemus (Lizzie Sigrist). The goddess Sterope (Katy Sigrist) leaves her sisters to help troubled Earth and falls in love with Oenamaus, a poor shepherd (Gareth Warner). This enrages the remaining sisters who pursue Sterope seeking revenge.

Thrusting up the hill comes a military Land Rover and an army of soldiers and the consequences of life on earth are painfully revealed as Oenamaus now finds himself saddled with an ordinary wife and not a goddess. Carl Calow was particularly strong as the young subaltern.

Tough old Empusa, beautifully portrayed by Annabel Bailey, is cruelly slain by her son Erin (Jonathan Harding). Sterope has a child and there lies the hope for a new future.

This was a wonderful ensemble company; the youngest must have been five and there were just too many excellent performances to mention by name.

They all played their parts with total conviction and with a vibrancy, commitment and obvious total enjoyment. Musical director Pal Kissaun had created a magical score that was fully realised in Debbie Camp's choreography.

Director Ade Morris should be justly proud of this sparkling production. Well done the folk of Boxford, this was community theatre at its very best!

ROBIN STRAPP

Trish Lee

ARTS EDITOR

e-mail: trish.lee@newburynews.co.uk

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

THIS WEEK

**The music of Bond, James Bond**

The Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra conjures up a world of exotic locations, fast cars and evil megalomaniacs  
**Page 4**



**Music**

Oxford promoter fixes it for the summer  
**Page 6**

**Teen Spirit**

Reviewer Yvette Caster keeps off the grass in Victoria Park  
**Page 7**

**Food and Drink**

James Callow finds a quiet spot for some laid-back indulgence  
**Page 8**

**Gardening**

The second part of Stuart Logan's potted version of a gardener's question time at which he was a panellist  
**Page 9**

**Online**

Learning about urban warfare in the comfort of your own home  
**Page 11**

**Newshounds**

A chance for children to win a *Thomas the Tank Engine* video  
**Page 12**

**Cinema**

Why the *Thunderbirds* are going to be a summer hit  
**Page 18**

**TV Guide**

Comprehensive programme listings and previews of the television highlights for the week  
**Pages 19-23**

**Where to contact us**

ADDRESS: Newspaper House, Faraday Road, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 2DW

**EDITORIAL**

Editorial telephone: 01635 564526  
Editorial Fax: 01635 522922  
E-mail: editor@newburynews.co.uk

**ADVERTISING**

Classified advertising: 01635 550444  
Advertising fax: 01635 46052  
E-mail: advert@newburynews.co.uk



■ Annabel Bailey as Empusa

Ref: 31-8420D



■ Lizzie Sigrist as Artemus

Ref: 31-8420M

## Happy ending for hospital

**Into The Woods, at New Theatre, Oxford, on Sunday, July 18**

**MUSIC THEATRE**

HAVING survived my trip into the woods with Newbury Operatic Society two weeks earlier, I journeyed to Oxford to see the outcome of *The Shoutime Challenge*, a concept involving staging an entire musical production in 48 hours.

With profits going to the Little People Big Needs campaign to raise money for a new children's hospital, Sondheim's *Into the Woods* proved an ideal, if rather daunting, choice, weaving together familiar fairy tales – *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Rapunzel* – to create a new story in which the characters must work together to achieve their goals.

Compered by comedian Mel Smith, the evening began with a showcase of songs from *Oliver!*, *Bugsy Malone* and *Les Misérables*, performed by a 100-strong group of youngsters (a

shrewd move on the part of organisers Eyebrow Productions to attract a larger audience). This was an entertaining appetiser for the main event.

The first act of *Into The Woods* follows a baker and his wife in their search for a cow, a red cape, a lock of yellow hair and a golden slipper, in order to lift a witch's curse so that they can have a child. Add some magic beans and a pair of princes from different fables, who are now competitive brothers agonising over their latest conquests, and you have the ingredients for a magical journey.

With a cast mostly drawn from recent drama school graduates, there were some fine talents on view, not least Esther Biddle in a compelling performance as the Baker's Wife, displaying excellent comic timing and a voice to die for (literally).

Lee Greenaway made a strong impression as wide-eyed Jack, searching for 'giants in the sky', while Joanna Hickman was a feisty Little Red, refusing to be fazed by a lascivious Wolf, played with relish by Eamonn O'Dwyer. The latter doubled as the Prince pursuing Sarah Carter's Cinderella, another runaway success.

Although musical director Nicholas Burns, conducting the New Orpheus Ensemble, encountered several hairy moments in the woods (other than the Wolf) and director John Sheerman would perhaps have welcomed another 24 hours to add greater polish to the proceedings, this seductive musical cast its spell on the audience, in the process raising at least £10,000 towards the children's hospital.

A happy ending indeed.  
**TREVOR DEFFERD**

## Banquet of rich music at Bedwyn

**Bedwyn Music Series: Richard Harwood, at St Mary's Church, Great Bedwyn, on Friday, July 30**

**MUSIC**

RICHARD Harwood's fine recital with Gretel Dowdeswell in Bedwyn Church on Friday evening included three works written by 26-year-old composers.

At that age, the young piano virtuoso Beethoven had gone to Berlin with the cellist Jean Pierre Duport to impress Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia with his two new cello sonatas Op.5.

He received a gold snuff box for his pains and Beethoven, apparently delighted, declared it "worthy of an ambassador".

When Schubert came across a curious new instrument the "arpeggione", a bowed guitar played cello-fashion between the knees, he wrote the only good music for it.

Samuel Barber was studying at the American Academy in Rome on a Pulitzer grant, the year he transcribed his famous *Adagio for Strings* from string-quartet movement to orchestra.

Harwood himself looks to be a couple of years off that age, but his wise choice of repertoire demonstrated his range and musical sensitivity.

With flawless technique and committed enquiring musicianship, he had the measure of all this music. He was an attentive accompanist where necessary in the Beethoven, where the fleet-fingered Dowdeswell had more of the music, a lyrically melancholic and discursive soloist in the Schubert and an equal partner in the Barber, where appropriately, both players changed up a gear and regaled us with 20th-century force and intensity.

Into this rich banquet, Harwood dropped a little savoury in the form of an attractive short solo written for him in 2001 by Martin Butler, a distillation of some ideas from his London opera *A Better Place*. Harwood talked us through its main themes: the ghostly harmonics of Thames mist, the quiet finger-tapping on the front of the cello and a falling motive lamenting the hero.

We were sent on our way, a spring in our step, with a charming trifle by Fauré.

**CHARLES SAMUEL**