
ONCE UPON A MATTRESS

Northern Light Theatre Company

Shedley Theatre

Until March 19

Review by Simon Slade

Based on Hans Christian Andersen's tale "The Princess and the Pea", "Once Upon a Mattress" is far from challenging theatre. Rather, its success relies on being a vehicle for a cast of top stage personalities. Carol Burnett, in her Broadway debut, created the part of Princess Winnifred through her timing and sharp performance.

Sadly, Ms Burnett is not appearing in this production. Those cast members who do have comic timing and acting ability are dragged down by the rest. This show is just not snappy or tight, and as such, so much of the comedy is lost. Entrances and cues need to be pacier.

The times where this show does work, it works very well. Theresa Dolman, as Queen Aggravaine, is brilliant. Her comic incantation scene in Act II was a fine example of comic acting. Steve Rudd, as Sir Harry, plays the melodrama as though he was born to it. Hayley Horton plays his true love Lady Larken, and her realistic style seems mismatched with Rudd. With some characters being played for melodrama and others for realism, the direction seems to lack focus. As a result, many of the minor principals are working hard but the effect is not cohesive. Kira-Marie Lavery as Princess Winnifred, Kurtys Ramond as the Minstrel and Rohan Watts as the Jester are all worthy of mention.

The dance numbers look a little like an end of year concert and in a few numbers it seemed that better dancers had been placed towards the rear of the stage rather than in front. Once again, there is the feeling that it is just not tight enough. An exception to that was the ballet scene, where four of the younger performers get to showcase their considerable talent in a piece that was nicely executed.

The set design is good, and the costumes show a lot of work. Overall the sound was quite good, although there was a tendency for levels to be run too high. The lighting design was uninspiring but generally executed well.