

Roald Dahl's George's Marvellous Medicine
Axminster Drama Club
Play
Director: Leigh Conley
The Guildhall, Axminster
20th December 2019
As seen by Joyce Pomeroy

The Guildhall was packed with what seemed like a great many children with a smattering of adults. Roald Dahl is clearly as much a favourite with young people as ever.

The ideal cast had been chosen with a young man in the title role who I had previously seen playing Gomez in *The Addams Family*. The audience was immediately in the palm of his hand. No second bidding was needed to encourage them to respond. They remembered the many ingredients for the medicine and where in the home and farmyard they had been found and were keen to help George recreate the potion. Seldom has a young audience, or any audience, been as totally engrossed in the story as this one was. Mum and Dad looked suitably harassed and were very much the busy farm folk, calling upon George to help with this and that when all he wanted to do was read his book. Once Grandma arrived they neatly made themselves scarce and left George to be at her beck and call. Later the possibilities of the medicine became apparent and their priorities changed. All this was most realistically played.

This Grandma is possibly the embodiment of everyone's nightmare version with the facial expressions and constant chewing action, the body language, the incessant demands, and the barking unpleasantness at George and his parents, Ugh! A wonderful exercise in characterisation but who the actor had studied to create this character will fortunately never be known! The costume was typically the attire of a dowdy old person but when Grandma grew and grew it grew also prompting the illusion that what we saw was indeed a giant version of the old lady. The makeup helped to produce the bad-tempered expression and the impression of a very old person because the actor was anything but. Grandma growing in size and later shrinking to almost nothing was staged very cleverly so that at just the right moment she was hidden or the view of her obscured.

The other two members of the cast were the Giant Chicken and the Puppeteer. We did not see the actor playing the chicken until the bows. She was covered completely by what was probably a very warm costume. With most likely limited vision the chicken raced around the stage as a chicken would. The puppeteer could be seen but we barely noticed her. Our attention was drawn to the puppet chicken or pig. This, of course, is a different skill from the more usual situation of becoming a character on stage and was most impressively achieved.

As always with this club teamwork is the key to its success. The puppet chickens, pigs and so on were made by the club. The costumes were designed to look as if this was a comic strip or cartoon. The set was very interesting depicting the farmhouse, chicken coop, and cowshed and also had the comic strip feel. This had a lot of appeal for the audience, old as well as young. Moving the action from the interior of the farmhouse to the farmyard was

neatly achieved by exiting the kitchen door at the rear of the set and moving around to the farmyard at the front of the stage. The set was most attractively constructed and painted, again by the Axminster Drama Club team.

Mics were used and enhanced sound well without any interference. The diction was clear and the dialogue strong, every word could be heard. The audience felt engaged with the story. The lighting was good and at times exciting. The special effects worked very well. Good use was made of all entrances including through the auditorium.

As an introduction to the theatre, this would take some beating. The children in this audience will not forget George's Marvellous Medicine and will be keen to experience more live theatre. Axminster Drama is to be congratulated on providing excellent entertainment for the young and young at heart.