



Society : EBOS
Production : The Wizard of Oz
Date : 3rd Nov 2018
Venue : The Wilde Theatre
Report by : Terry Hunt

[Show Report](#)

To quote Director Stuart Hayllor,

"Theatre is subjective, and what floats one person's boat may sink another's".

Never a truer word...however, as also alluded to by Stuart "The Wizard of Oz" is a bit of an exception to all the rules. DON'T MESS WITH OZ...and I was delighted to find that EBOS didn't.

Managing audience expectations is quite often the key to retaining a loyal audience. Risk taking needs to be measured in such a way that you don't alienate your supporters, but the only risk here was taking on the massively popular, evocative, and well-known story of 'Oz' in the first place.

It's a big story to stage effectively so there is a possibility that it could all go horribly wrong, but if ever there was an amateur society capable of having a damn good stab at it, it's EBOS.

On the subject of staging...it is something I look at carefully. The set is the biggest and most visible aspect of the production and the one thing the audience look at from start to finish. Quite often it can take up the lion's share of the budget and is where short-cuts are most frequently made. Inevitably, with the scale of scenery ideally needed for 'Oz', compromises will have to be made.

Victoria Spearings design certainly kept the essence of what is required, such as the rustic Kansas farm and the stylised world of Oz. The various multi use trucks all appeared to move quite effortlessly and the upstage steps, levels and flats, quite solid, so very well done to the construction team. Painting did look unfinished in places. The farm house door was painted nicely, but the rest of house was untouched. The two shades of green on the back of the Tin man/Scarecrow trucks looked as though they'd only been given half a 2nd coat? If meant to be two shades, the line needed to be more defined, OR blended in more. To me, as it was, it looked like it had been forgotten.

The art deco buildings and trees were all very nicely produced and looked great.

My issue with the overall design is that from our 'arrival' in Oz, we're pretty much looking at the Emerald City for most of the performance...whereas the city itself actually doesn't feature THAT much. One option (on a limited budget) maybe have been to make the buildings more colourful for Munchkinland, but to coat them in green UV paint which is invisible until lit in UV, at the reveal of the Emerald City? Alternatively use colours with a green hue (ie a greenish blue/yellow/grey..and green of course) which when lit in a strong green light, would all appear green. Perhaps not a very true emerald green, but maybe a fair compromise?

I would have also considered setting the cornfield and forest scenes, in front of the gauze (or a solid cloth if an option), and lighting it appropriately. (Might I suggest looking at the benefit of possibly investing in Rear-fold Runners for the tab tracks).

This might sound unfairly critical of the set, but in true EBOS style, what was presented was done very well, with just a few question marks over some of the painting. I understand that producing numerous large settings on a limited budget and with restricted theatre facilities, is a challenge, but EBOS always do very well. What I felt missing was the sense of Dorothy's physical journey through this strange land.

Scene changes happened quite smoothly...with the exception of repositioning the farm house into Munchkinland which went on for quite a while, in complete silence. As there was plenty of busy, gloomy lighting for the 'twister' there should have been ample time to position the house, so I can only assume there was a problem or the timing went wrong? These things happen.

One of my pet hates is seeing stage crew, dressed in blacks and headphones...wandering about the stage DURING the action. I accept that now and then, an unsuspecting individual gets caught in the lights when not getting off stage quick enough at the end of a scene change, but routinely moving about in full lighting, during a routine, completely shatters any sense of illusion. It's something which really isn't difficult to resolve. If moving anything (furniture, props or scenery) in plain view, it should be done by the cast, or crew in costume....with a hat if they really can't remove headphones for the time it takes.

Congratulations to **Michael Brenkley** for his lighting design, and **Steve Davies** for the operation. As 'Technical' time is limited for most amateur societies, effective LX can often suffer as a result, however there were no such worries here. Rich swathes of colour; smooth, often flowing cross-fades and well used, interesting effects.

I loved the magical appearance of the yellow brick road across the downstage apron. Perhaps it would have been nice to have that 'appear' more often, especially when Dorothy set off with each of her new friends? The Twister effects worked well and the rainbow colours on U/S gauze were gorgeous. I was especially impressed by the combination of back lighting and FOH lighting for the perfect illumination of the characters without producing a jumbled concoction of colours and shadows all around.

If anything, the Petrified Forest could have been made more atmospheric with smoke and more sinister lighting, but overall, an excellent achievement.

Well done too, to **Tom Horrox** for the sound design/operation. The mix of the orchestra, was spot on...and sounded like a full orchestra at times. The volume was also well balanced against vocals.

Perhaps this is one of the advantages of the orchestra being mixed with the voices before being amplified, wonderful though it is to listen to the raw, unbridled sound of an orchestra.

There were no issues with dialogue, all being very clear, except one or two of the smaller children who were very quiet. Always difficult, if not individually mic'd.

Sounds effects too...no problem, so all in all, great work by Tom.

For the most part, **Sara Richardson**, **Bronwyn Hodgkins** and **Margery Jackson** followed the prescribed formula for costumes. Fairly bland and colourless farmworker outfits for 'Kansas', switching to more colour and stylised designs for Oz. Combined with **Jo Stringers** Make Up for the principles, Dorothy, Lion, Tin Man, Scarecrow and Wicked Witch were excellently presented. Credit to Sara too, for the contribution of the Poppy costumes to the snow scene, which were a great surprise and worked extremely well.

Prof Marvel was notably well kitted out with a nicely fitting, period suit. A good example of a costume which stands out because it's just right, but would go unnoticed when using something fairly standard.

I also liked the slightly more glamorous twist on the Wicked Witch's costume, keeping the overall A-line outline of a traditional 'witch' but adding different textures.

The one disappointment I had was for some of the children. Whereas the Monkey costumes worked well, T-shirts did seem a bit of an easy option for the Munchkins as they looked like children, and I did feel that the Mayor in particular could have been adorned with some sort of regalia befitting his position.

There were some lovely props and effects. Not being exactly sure who was responsible for which, I shall deal with work of **Duncan Bruce, Natalie Hayllor, Kirsty McDougall, Amy Williams and Debbie Mann**, all together.

'Props', on the whole, i.e., bikes, baskets, signs etc., didn't look as though half measures had been taken, so credit to all for that. The snow effect was a nice addition, as was the flaming broomstick. Perhaps more a point of direction, however the effect of the Wicked Witch melting into the smoke may have had more impact if she'd not just appeared from the hole into which she disappeared. It worked very well, but lost some of its impact.

The balloon was a nice idea but that whole section seemed a bit clumsy. I'm not sure what to suggest here as it's all a bit confusing as to what did happen and why it didn't work as well as it might have. At the very least, the illusion of the balloon might have been more effective if it had been in a follow spot, with the rest of the LX dimmed?

I have to admit that I was disappointed by 'The Wizard'. Perhaps it's just a personal thing, but I feel he should have taken a more human form in some respect. Pipes and lights didn't work for me. Given that the Wizard is supposed to be a fake entity, it doesn't have to be anything especially clever.

On a more positive note, getting Dorothy into the Ruby slippers was very nicely done.

Erin Hope Pharo's choreography worked well for the varying abilities of the cast. No one looked out of their depth, and if anyone was, it was well hidden. Credit must go to the work with the younger members of the cast in particular, who coped surprisingly well with some fairly complex choreography, with a little guidance from Munchkin Leaders. Essentially, 'Wizard' isn't primarily a 'dance show', so I'm glad it wasn't filled with inappropriate dance numbers. I did enjoy the dance break in Merry Old Land Of Oz, and loved The Jitterbug which built from a solo routine to a full-scale dance number, as the music builds. Very good work.

Musically, I can't fault the production. I'm not a musician so hardly qualified to comment on finer points anyway, but under the Musical Direction of **Tim Cumper**, the 12 piece orchestra did an outstanding job of recreating all the musical numbers as the vast majority of the audience would remember them. In taking the orchestra very much for granted, I simply enjoyed the music and wasn't aware of any minor issues which may or may not have occurred.

Perhaps my only observations is a particularly well balanced sound, which, as already alluded to, may be as a result of mixing the orchestra and vocals before amplification. Whatever you did...it worked to great effect.

When it boils down to it, the character of Dorothy isn't too interesting. It's no reflection on **Lucy Marshall's** charming performance that this was no different. Lucy's looked the part, her accent was good, clear and consistent, her singing was delightful and her relationship with all the other characters felt quite genuine. I can't fault Lucy's performance in any way, but I feel it's a shame the character is somewhat over shadowed by far more interesting and larger than life characters.

I think I'm correct in saying that 'Toto' is Lucy's own pet dog? Either way, well done to Lucy for being able to handle **Suki** without being thrown by any unpredictable behaviour. Granted, Suki was extremely well behaved, but I'm guessing not EVERYTHING went 100% as planned, although a delightful performance from Suki.

Chris Walker and **Anna McCormack** belied their years as ageing Aunt Em and Uncle Henry. I feel Aunt Em could have been a little stronger in her character at times, but Anna delivered her lines with a good clear voice and accent.

Chris' Uncle Henry was assured and stoic. Definitely the sensible one about the farm.

In many respects, the character of Miss Gultch is less likeable than the Wicked Witch of the West and **Megan West** successfully portrayed everything hateful about her. The search for Dorothy and Toto in the crowd could have been taken with a bit less haste, not quite to the level of the 'Child Catcher', but she certainly comes into that category of scary characters. However, the grating voice and bullying demeanour was captured well.

There was an enjoyable camaraderie between Luke **Robinson**, **Paul Herbert** and **Matt Thompson** as Hickory, Hunk and Zeke. There was the undeniable sense that they made their own entertainment to alleviate the drudgery of their work, with some great 'business' with the wagon.

I do understand why different actors were used as the Scarecrow, Tin Man and Lion (..and Wicked Witch), however, there were references to the farm workers being in 'Oz'. This would have been easier to overlook if Matt hadn't played so prominently as the Guard. Other characters such as the (unpleasantly mocking) crows, were more easily disguised. Perhaps there was time for Paul to get made up if he had played both Zeke and Lion?

Matt's 'Oz Guard' was full of character, with great comedic timing and expression. Well done too, for leading the routine in Merry Old Land of Oz so competently. An excellent performance.

Duncan Hamilton's portrayal of Prof Marvel and Oz was spot on. I found myself beguiled by his soft tones which worked perfectly as a conman, yet he was totally likeable. Duncan's intonation and line delivery was perfect and he handled the various props naturally. A class performance.

I felt **Amy Cowie's** Glinda was quietly commanding, looked ethereal and Amy sang beautifully, but I felt she appeared a bit detached and came across as a touch condescending rather than caring, at times. I feel a slightly softer speaking voice may have helped.

If anything, **Laura Thain** looked a bit too attractive (albeit green) as the Wicked Witch of the West, but absolutely did the part justice. Laura has a perfectly pitched screech of a laugh, domineering presence, good use of props and interacted well with other characters. She punctuated her dialogue nicely... and melts exceedingly well. A first-rate performance.

Courtney Fleming was a gift to the part of the Scarecrow. His agility was gravity defying at times, yet the physicality of the lissom Scarecrow was never out of control. A brilliant physical performance. Courtney didn't appear terribly confident with his singing, but it was coped admirably, and he kept character through his expressively delivered dialogue at all times.

In the story, there is a special bond between the Scarecrow and Dorothy, which did come across from Courtney and Lucy. Very heart warming.

It's difficult to do very much with the Tin Man, but **Daniel Strong** seemed perfectly comfortable taking a little bit of a back seat to the more gregarious Scarecrow and Lion, without looking lost or out of place. Daniels resonant voice enhanced the illusion of a tin man, and he did a great job of balancing physical awkwardness with good timing in his movement.

The Lion is the character you can have most fun with and **Paul Sheppard** didn't disappoint. Bags full of character and what a fabulous first entrance. Paul's accent did fluctuate throughout, so it may have been better to concentrate on the character of the voice, rather than an accent, but the performance was full of energy and his performance of "If I Were King Of The Forest", was masterful.

The Ensemble and dancers made clean unfussy entrances and exits and reacted appropriately where required. I can't say that anyone stood out for the wrong reasons, so everyone was clearly supporting the principals effectively, and filling in minor roles well, In particular, the 'trees' displayed some great attitude.

Well done to **Team Ruby**, who performed the evening I attended. I'm sure Team Emerald were just as wonderful. Munchkins delivered their lines well and the flying monkeys kept in character all the time. Special mention must go to **Sam Bennett**, who I understand was 'Lead Monkey' at the performance I saw, and accidentally slipped backwards off the set, scraping his leg. I'm sure it must have hurt, but Sam carried on performing like a trouper. Well done Sam.

Overall, the EBOS production sounded delightful, was faithful to the expectations of the audience with some wonderful performances and lovely effects.

I did feel there were a few details which were glossed over, such as the reference to the picture having been taken by Dorothy, although she never actually went to get it, and there was no lighting change immediately preceding the reference to the storm, when it was supposed to be raining. These are small points which do make a difference. Paying attention to detailed requirement in the script, early on, will usually help avoid these kinds of omissions. However, I also understand that they may have been errors on the night? Such is the joy of live theatre.

Final credit to **Duncan Bruce** for his poster and programme design. A nice quality programme, easy to read (it's sometimes forgotten that programmes are often difficult to read in dim auditorium light), with just enough interesting content.

As already alluded to at the beginning of my report, the Wizard of Oz is perhaps not the easiest of productions to stage effectively, but EBOS did do a wonderful job and I'm sure it was enjoyed by everyone just as much as I enjoyed it. Congratulations to all involved.

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