

## *Account of Purley on Thames*

# Rain or Shine - A Midsummer Night's Dream

R200508 21/1/2018

*Published in Project Purley Journal September 2016*

### *A Surfeit of the Sweetest Things*

The line from “A Midsummer Night's Dream” describes perfectly the performance of Shakespeare's comedy by Rain or Shine at The Barn on Friday, June 10th. The eight-strong actors line-up is much changed from their previous visit, and the agility and vibrancy of the newcomers shone through as they cavorted and tumbled across their extended stage to entertain an appreciative audience.

The Bard's comedies are always open to interpretation, and the introduction of pre-show entertainment by some dancers and rather amateurish jugglers heralded an evening where many liberties were taken with the original script. But the director, Tom Jordan, had placed more emphasis on developing the characters in the first half of the performance and leaving most of the slapstick until the second half.

Bright costumes, strident voices and acrobatic movement, but not too much direct humour, were much in evidence to start with. However the actors really let rip with the comedy after the interval. We watched a wonderful bout of all-in wrestling and all-out hair pulling between the two female leads, a stuffed dog that cocked its leg against several members of the audience as it was walked through The Barn, Bottom's ears which seemed to have a separate existence of their own, swords made rather paradoxically of bursting balloons, and a potentially beautiful musical interlude cut rudely short by a trumpeting herald.

But most of all there was Bottom, played provocatively by Rob Leetham, and who utterly dominated the final 20 minutes of the play. Rob, according to the programme notes, has a part-time occupation as an armed robber (he does this while role-playing for a UK security company)! He certainly milked the audience for all they were worth as he strode about the stage, hamming it up so much that even his fellow performers were finding it difficult not to laugh, then having the effrontery to take three curtain calls of his own before joining the rest of the cast for the final bow.

Of course the audience loved it, to the extent that the leaving collection amounted to £250. Together with the bar profit and our share of ticket sales that means that Project Purley, who undertake the organisation and running of the event, can, on this occasion, donate £600 to the Intensive Care Unit at the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

I thank everyone who helped towards the success of the evening. In particular I am grateful to Catherine Sampson who arranges refreshments, and the families of Pat Taylor, Marion Venners and Ben Viljoen, who hosted the actors overnight and made them so welcome. I am also in debt to our lovely audience, who obviously enjoyed themselves and clapped so enthusiastically in all the right places.

You will be interested to know that Rain or Shine will return to The Barn on Friday, December 9th to present Conan Doyle's thriller, “The Hound of the Baskervilles.” Look out for a special guest appearance during the evening!

David Downs