

Report on HONK! by The Grayshott Stagers

Group:	The Grayshott Stagers
Production:	Honk!
Director:	Helen Coyte
Musical Director:	Rob Miller
Choreographers:	Debra Allen & Robyn Davies
Date:	Friday 27 th June 2022
Venue:	Grayshott Village Hall

Description of the Production:

At last Grayshott Stages were able to bring *Honk!* to the stage. It was planned for two years ago and rehearsals were well under way when the dreaded Covid struck. In the intervening years, many of the original cast and team had to depart to pastures new (excuse the pun) and a fresh start was made. The result was an undoubted success, overcoming the endless Covid pitfalls along the way.

Honk! is based on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*, telling the story of an odd looking baby duck, Ugly, and his quest to find his mother. It's a touching story of rags to riches with lots of adventure along the way. Rejected by his fellow nestlings and even his 'foster' dad, but loved and protected by his 'mother', Ugly is seduced away by a wily Cat who wants to eat him. He manages to escape but has no idea how to find his way home. He meets a beautiful swan, Penny, tangled in a fishing line and after saving her, the two birds fall in love but she has to return to her flock and fly south for the winter. Finally, Ugly's mother finds him frozen in the snow and her warm tears manage to thaw him out – he comes back to life, as a handsome swan! Penny returns and she and Ugly are reunited and the two swans decide to live the rest of their lives in the same pond as Ugly's loyal mother. I actually had quite a lump in my throat at this happy ending!

Musical Director Rob Miller and his talented band of three provided the perfect accompaniment, never too loud or drowning out the singers. It was quite a complicated score which they mastered effortlessly.

Front of House and Theatre Ambience:

A friendly welcome by the Front of House team set the scene. Grayshott Village Hall is about 120 years old, solidly built with good facilities and a decent sized stage. The enthusiastic audience all but filled the auditorium and had plenty of space.

The Programme:

The colourful, good quality, programme was very useful. Two helpful introductions by the Chair of the Stagers, Joe White, and Helen Coyte, Director of *Honk!* gave us the background and history of the show and all the hoops they had to negotiate. Excellent snapshots and photos of the cast showed that they all had years of experience in acting, dance and directing behind them, a lot of it with The Grayshott Stagers which makes it quite a family group.

Scenery/Set/Props:

The simple set was used effectively, covering various scenes without having to deal with major changes – the duckyard, the cat's kitchen, a cottage. Props were imaginative. The fluorescent under water dancing fish were particularly inventive and the use of office chairs in a dance routine was very clever.

Lighting:

Effective lighting was appropriate and unfussy. The use of spots, which are important and always improve any show, was well utilised.

Costumes:

The costumes were a riot of colour, combining the fantasy of the farm animals with human touches, accompanied by magnificent wigs for the 'grown up' ducks. I loved the orange leg warmers for the ducklings!

The Production:

The lively introduction with tap routines and eggs hatching to reveal three self-important ducklings provided a jolly start to the show. Drake, (Ugly's Father) performed by Richard Ashton played the part well with good comedy timing and a friendly voice, clearly proud of his three new offspring. His wife Ida, Abi White, was perfect as the overworked Mum, portraying her role as mother very well and her scenes with Ugly were particularly moving. Ugly, expertly portrayed by Tony Carpenter, was hilarious from the moment he emerged from his giant egg, all gangly and uncoordinated, naïve and somewhat shy but with a determination and strength of character which overcame the taunts and hostility meted out to him by his siblings and even his Father. His voice blended nicely with White's, which meant their songs sounded genuine with plenty of emotion.

The "baddy" role was well performed by Kyrie Carpenter as Cat, a newcomer to The Stagers. The difficulty with this role is to not make it look too pantomime, rather make him slightly larger than life, and he managed this perfectly. Other smaller roles – but no less poignant – were Queenie, the Female Cat played by Jo Weller and her pal Lowbutt, Kate Buxton, whose friendship was obvious.

Eric Collins and Debra Allen were wonderful as Greylag and Dot, geese who were trying to help Ugly get back to the Duck Pond. Collins' military manner gave the part a clever dimension and Allen's hopeless attempts to keep in step behind him were very funny. To my shame, I can't remember the character who gave us a hint of Alan Whicker's Letter From America, but well done - a little gem!

As well as the lead roles, everyone's performance was flawless. The singing and harmonies were excellent and every word could be heard. I can honestly say there was no weak link in this production. It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening and as I always like a happy ending, this completely fitted the bill.

Congratulations to Director Helen Coyte in her directorial debut. She follows in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother, being the third generation of her family to direct for The Stagers – a talented family indeed.

Jane Turner
Assistant NODA Rep