

Deer Park Broadcaster Lifestyles

Out-of-this-world entertainment: 'Wizard of Oz' at PLT

By **GLORIA WALKER SMITH**

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Seniors who saw "Wizard of Oz" as children are still flocking to see this classic every time it appears on stage. They, along with every age group from toddlers to baby boomers, are still finding pure enjoyment in the fanciful story as they did throughout their lifetimes.

When you have a chance to see it done as expertly as Director Katie Reed, Pianist Phyllis Harris, cast and crew have polished it, your joy is renewed as an extra special gift.

Chosen as the 2010 Pasadena Chamber of Commerce Cultural Arts Committee venue, "Wizard" is a true high-point in community theater and this area is blessed to have an abundance of that. The evening began with an innovative dinner in the Multi-purpose Room behind the Main stage at PLT. Who does not love dinner theater? The colorful room was packed with guests from other theater troupes, city and Pasadena Chamber officials, as well as area residents looking for a special evening. Raffle tickets were sold on three choice items, which always adds to the excitement.

The crowd moved into the stage area and it was apparent immediately, "This was a sold-out performance!" And well it should have been! The immeasurable amount of time and energy that went into preparing this outstanding offering deserved nothing less. Viewing the set at first glance, it seems a bit austere, but prepare yourself for delightful surprises. Special effects and sounds, along with innovative costumes, witnessed to the fact that much extra thought and planning went into this showing – not what you would expect of community theater! Professionalism and imagination are certainly not limited to big budget and lavish productions.

Choosing a cast, where every member is perfect for that specific role — acting ability, as well as singing ability, from the background players to the major performers — that's the skill and talent of "old pro's" (high compliment) like Katie Reed and Phyllis Harris. Taking the abilities of seasoned players and first-timers and melding those through practice and insight into a smooth, exciting product, is a true gift.

This was a huge cast and even the logistics involved in making the limited space work successfully for adult and child performers is a feat worth recognizing. The intricacy of dance routines performed at such close proximity was a work of art. The youngest dancers obviously loved what they were doing so much, they were disciplined and committed to making it work.

The costumes were so professionally constructed for the major players, munchkins and flying monkeys, they would be at home on the Hobby Center stage. Especially for the adults, the costumes, worn more than two hours, must have been almost unbearably hot! Such is the dedication of people who truly love theater.

During intermission, a hotly contested live auction was ram-rodged by crowd pleaser Bear Hebert, who presented each item with expertise and comedy, raising over \$1,000.

Risking slighting some of the cast, I hesitate to single out any performer, because they were all accomplished and perfectly suited for their roles. Although two young ladies play the part of Dorothy, the Kansas girl who winds up in Oz, Chelsea Sanders was the one I saw. Well-prepared for the role, Chelsea is basically a choreographer with a very good singing voice. She simply LOOKS the part of Dorothy! Chelsea is a principal dancer with the Bay Area Houston Ballet and has led choreography sessions at the University of Kansas. Watching Chelsea's face as she performs is a joy – she is absorbed totally in her character. Auntie Em (Vanessa Pearson) appears in Kansas and in Oz. This is true of all of the residents of "the farm," including Uncle Henry (Geoffrey Geiger); hired hands

Hunk/Scarecrow (Revis Bell) and Hickory/Tin Man (Jeff Coletta) and Zeke/Lion (Janet Sharpley).

Now comes the most difficult part of the review. Rarely, this reviewer is faced with a dilemma of "saying something NICE" about a play that doesn't measure up. Here, the dilemma is "How to say something NICE ENOUGH" about these players.

Glinda, the beautiful good witch (Ashley Bagwell) looks like a dream in her sparkling white gown and brings experience all the way back to her childhood days when PLT was in their Tulip Street location. Appearing on her high school stage and at TUTS, it's past time for Ashley to come back to PLT.

Another PLT player who has been away too long is RoseMarie Trauschke, who combined nasty Miss Gultch and the wicked witch into evil at its best – facial expressions, the grating speaking voice and the maniacal cackle. The make-up artists excelled when they concocted this monster.

Favorite on the PLT stage and other area theaters, Jeff Coletta is a first class chameleon – playing everything from Snoopy to Emile de Becque and countless parts in between. What a job to build that Tin Man costume ON Jeff for each performance! Revealing his vocal talents in "South Pacific" at Clear Creek Community Theatre, Jeff used that ability generously as the Metal Man, pining for a heart.

Revis Bell is a rare treat at PLT and never disappoints. The loveable Scarecrow who longs for a brain is a triumph for Bell and a joy for the audience. Special thanks go to this seasoned actor/singer for enduring the straw in his costume for agonizing hours.

Racking up a seemingly endless list of roles, hilarious Janet Sharpley is the ultimate Cowardly Lion. It took remarkable courage, while encased in heavy brown velvet, mounds of curls and piles of make-up, for this peerless performer to cavort across the stage throughout the play as if she were wearing layers of chiffon. She imparts her comedy genius to audiences all over the area, who are drawn to any venue listing Janet Sharpley on the bill.

Another chameleon is long time favorite, Julie Owen, who adds the Gypsy Madame Marvel and I-can't-tell-you-what-else to her list of stellar performances. She always brings sparkle to every role – comedy, drama or musical.

Have I forgotten anyone? Of course, I have. Space won't allow me to name every stage hand, set and light designer, munchkin, poppy, crow and flying monkey, Oznian, choreographer, assistant director, stage manager and support person. Kudos in abundance to each of those!

Don't hesitate – make plans now to treat yourself, friends and family to a thoroughly enjoyable evening at this classic. It runs weekends through Sept. 12, with Friday and Saturday shows at 8 p.m. and Sunday matinee at 3 p.m.

Call for reservations, 713-941-1758. The theatre is located at 4318 Allen-Genoa, south off Fairmont Parkway.