

Rainbow of a show

Nomads' Oz, packed with laughter and colour, brings panto to Newbury early

Newbury Nomads: The Wizard of Oz, at The Corn Exchange, from Wednesday, October 3 to Saturday, October 6

It says much for Nomads' production that I found myself humming *The Merry Old Land of Oz* before breakfast the following day.

Director Jeanette Maskell's experience with things theatrical brought panto to

Newbury early and gave the audience, which included a multitude of children, an evening packed with laughter and colour. Nic Cope and his orchestra got the balance between voice and music exactly right and came up with just the required mood, accurately reflecting the action on stage.

Dorothy is a dream role for any young girl and more than 20 had auditioned. The successful 14-year-old Louise Young's mature, musical voice, full of strength and expression, enhanced everything she sang, as she settled nicely, especially once her three companions arrived on the scene, into being the kid from Kansas.

In Daniel Maskell (the very floppy Scarecrow), Stuart Honey (the creaky silvery Tin Man) and Jeremy Mann (the lovable cowardly Lion), Nomads have three of the finest amateur actors and singers in the area. This show depends on these three characters for laughs and emotion and they came up trumps.

Nikki West (who was also the producer) playing Oz's equivalent of the fairy godmother, the Sorceress of the North, was glamorous in gold and lovely to hear, as was Juliet Clarke in the role of Gloria.

Unfortunately, the actor playing Oz had a very bad night on Friday, but I am sure that no one was more aware of that than the man himself.

What with Munchkins, citizens of Oz, skeletons, farmhands, Jitterbugs, soldiers and snowflakes, the hardworking chorus and dancers had had a lot to learn.

After the particularly glum first entrance of the farmhand chorus (*Somewhere Over the Rainbow* doesn't have to be *that* soulful), things cheered up with jolly, brightly-clad Munchkins, an enthusiastic Emerald City crowd and some good Ozian Army soldier-drilling telling of much rehearsing.

This lively and exuberant show was full of a sense of enjoyment from those on stage, matched by smiles on the audience's faces. Shouts of 'hurray' preceded the overture, the villainous witch was hissed and booed satisfactorily and the good guys were cheered.

Nomads are still flying high. Congratulations.

CAROLINE FRANKLIN