

latest reviews

production: Shooting Shakespeare

[print] 

company: Forkbeard Fantasy

venue: Sherman Theatre, cardiff

date: October 14, 2004

A night of madness and hilarity, despite its silent film inspiration it was the sounds of this production that first tickled our eardrums and alerted us to the fact that we were in for a feast of mind-boggling delight.

Brothers Chris and Tim Britton set up their company Forkbeard Fantasy in 1974. Throughout the past thirty years they have presented some extraordinary productions, *The Fall of the House Usherettes*, *The Barbers of Surreal*, *Frankenstein*, and *The Brain*. They have honed their multimedia work of film, cartoon, automata and puppetry and have become crazy masters of their own unique art.

This latest production is a fascinating, fantastic feast of all their achievements. They are both great showmen with a great love of both film and theatre. *Shooting Shakespeare* was inspired by Silent Shakespeare films from the British Film Archive recently released on video with a new score by Laura Rossi. *Shooting Shakespeare* was commissioned for the Bath Shakespeare Festival 2004.

We join Didier Sponge and Desmond Fairybreath as they set about putting Shakespeare down on film for the first time at the beginning of the twentieth century. The ear grating music fades, we see a grainy naked athlete running on a grainy screen, he fades away and a larger than life be-whiskered storyteller appears on the stage. Looking at the programme, this could be either or both Britton brothers, as both of them are credited with playing this part. Seven actors play, in all, twenty-two different parts. The skill with which they quickly change in and out of elaborate costumes and assume another role is both bewildering and masterly.

A dark alley is projected onto a large screen at the back of the stage. The stage door of The Old Queens Theatre opens out onto it. We are told this is a murder story. On the screen three detectives are examining the body outside the door of the theatre. Our man on the stage walks neatly through the cinema screen and magically he joins the other men on the film. Such

mind bending, maniacal moments continue to fascinate as the show progresses.

We meet the delightful Celia Lipgloss and the vain and conceited Tristien Fewey. Louise Howells and Jay Thomas are able to bring an endearing delicacy to these parts whilst, at the same time sharing in the melodramatic nature of the overall piece.

The real masterly lay in the use of film animation and elaborate props. The bicycling camera/projector is used for great effect, gets some good laughs and serves as a useful device for getting people on and off the stage, probably to change in to another tricky costume. Just as disaster is about to ruin theatre impresario Fairybreath, played with a joyful exasperation by Tim Britton, his brother Chris Britton as a distinguished Prospero steps in to rescue the situation and get on with the filming of *The Tempest*.

The projected sequence of scene painting is quite breathtakingly magical and enormous fun. The device that Prosero sits in to disguise himself as a violin-playing auditor is superb with its extremely skilful projecting of a new face for him on to a 'face-sized' screen. Ariel in both the live form of a puppet on the shoulders of madcap actor Ed Jobling and in its animated form flying all around the theatre was both hugely clever and hugely amusing.

It did all end happily but just as confusingly as the previous madcap hour. After having such a good time it may seem odd to carp but I did feel the acting though big and bold did sometimes not quite take the audience into its confidence as much as it might have done, and the set was a bit sparse, but the expertise of this company in drawing uproarious laughter from its animation and cinematic jiggery-pokery is something quite special and a bit of a treasure.

reviewer: [Michael Kellington](#)

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