

Suburban Witches by Kei Bailey

Heckington Youth Theatre

June 2022

I was warmly welcomed by Keith Bagglely at Heckington Village Hall and felt right at home chatting to the other audience members who seemed excited to see a production that should have been performed 2 years ago, but due to the pandemic of 2020/21 was postponed until now.

The story involved school children, who feel bullied by their fellow pupils and decide to get their own back. Amber Grigsby (Grace Whyment) and best friend Edwin Fairfoot, (Archie King) discover witchcraft and with help from Cornelia Cropper (Jessica Revitt), try to bring the lead bully down a peg or two. Their spell backfires and eventually, they realise that being popular is not always the easiest position. Friendships, peer pressure and learning about life's ups and downs, and being your best self, all feature within the plot.

The main characters acted extremely well. The 5 popular girls, Belinda (Lily Mitchell), Madison (Holly Walker), Destiny (Isla McQuade-Smith), Nicole (Lola Ruddock), and Shannon (Danielle Potter) all seemed a well-knit team, their characterisation and body language created a bonded 'alpha' group. Until Charm arrived (Eloise McTiernan) to disrupt their games. Sid and Max (Joe Hall and Laural Mountain) were brilliant, their diction, timing, and sense of fun lit the stage when they portrayed playground debates with lots of humour.

Skilful scene changes were slick, and groups of actors created many scenes with simple props and few chairs, superbly done. I particularly enjoyed the cyberspace scenes, where Maude (Izzy Hall), Saffron (Faith Butler) and Shelby (Emily Crosthwaite) acted together with Amber and Cornelia to spell-create Charm who was played dramatically by Eloise McTiernan. Other outstanding performances were by the duo Erin and Philip, Emma Case and Harvey Grainger. Their funny interactions, their timing and excellent acting skills, created a lovely partnership showing lots of talent. Other school children were played by Caitlyn Saxby, JP Sagrott, Matilda Baldock, Amelia Oscroft, Sophie Snowball, Millie Webb, Callum Daniels and Hannah Priestley. Ellie Bayliss and Liberty Whyment as the younger sister and friend duo, Dora and Katie, were very believable. All performed well and we could hear every line. Some of the actors were substituted due to illness, but I couldn't tell as they all acted their parts well and supported each other through the show. Especially Hannah Priestley who only stepped in as Abigail at the dress rehearsal. It was obvious to me that the whole theatre group cared and supported each other on and off the stage.

Of course, a youth theatre group, even one as lucky enough to have Kei Bailey write for them, can not function without the dedicated team of chaperones, directors and stage managers, committee members, lighting effects, and sound production. I recognised Callum Thursby's excellent lighting and sound plot. (Were the musical interludes from the 1988 film Beetlejuice?) I loved the colourful lively backdrop created by Katie Calo which enhanced the staging.

An excellent production from Heckington Youth Theatre and I look forward to watching these fledgling young actors cultivate their skills under such expert support and leadership

Jules Jones

NODA Representative