

<b>Production</b>	The Three Musketeers
<b>Society</b>	Frodsham Players
<b>Venue</b>	Castle Park House
<b>Type of Production</b>	Play
<b>Director</b>	Tony Boyd-Williams
<b>Written by</b>	John Nicholson & Le Navet Bete
<b>Review</b>	04.07.24
<b>Reviewer</b>	Jake Powell

Frodsham Players ventured to Castle Park House for their annual outdoor performance – this year the comedy adventure of ‘The Three Musketeers’. Directed by Tony Boyd-Williams (who directed last year’s outdoor production), this promised to be a night of fun and mad-capped adventures. Almost panto-esque with breaking the fourth wall and audience participation, Tony’s vision was clear and the actors attacked this well. The concept of a group of friends putting on a show was made clear, and this was reflected in how the production was staged, with hockey sticks and umbrellas used as swords, bikes used as horses, and costumes looking like they came out of a fancy dress box. Using the natural elements of the park (trees and bushes) the company created a backstage area that masked the performers, and allowed them to get to different entrance points without being seen. The pace of the production was generally good. Entrances were slick, and the performers were in character as soon as they were in the sight lines of the audience. The pace during the dialogue could have been pushed a bit more to further enhance the comedy. There were some actors that were a bit slow in picking up cues, which meant that some of the comedy was lost. There were some good moments of direction throughout, such as the portraits. This could have been pushed further in a comedic sense by getting the performers to replicate famous paintings (like Martina recreating ‘The Son of Man’). There was also reference to Porthos messing with Athos’s drink with no visual prop, which made the lines referencing it not get the laughs it should get. As mentioned, the costumes looked like they had come out of a fancy dress box, which helped aid Tony’s vision.

As this was an outdoor production, technical aspects were limited. With two speakers stage left and right, the production used music to aid scene changes and underscore scenes, as well as providing recorded sound effects. The sound balance was good. A set of lights were used to illuminate the playing area as dusk fell.

Andrew Wilson led the company well as D’Artagnan, Conte de Wardes and Bertie. He had excellent physicality and wasn’t afraid of throwing himself around the playing space. Andrew played up to the audience and interacted with them well when needed. With an exaggerated French accent, Andrew’s projection and diction were very good. This was a strong, leading performance.

Jac Wardle did a good job as Athos, Papa and Blacksmith. There was thought put into the different characterisations offered from Jac. There was a slight hesitation in picking up cues, particularly in the scenes with the other musketeers. As Athos, Jac was a good leader of the musketeers.

Rosie Hannah Wilson played Aramis and Torquill. Rosie was secure in her lines and direction. Her vocal clarity and projection were very good with every word able to be

heard. Rosie worked well with the other musketeers, and was able to display a good sense of comedy in the second act.

Martina Keith-Stewart did well as Porthos, Maman and Bar Lady. Martina has a good understanding of comedy, and knows how to deliver her lines for great comic effect. Her performance as Porthos was strong, and added more comedy to the production. She worked well with the other musketeers, particularly Rosie.

David Varley created three distinct characters, namely Cardinal Richeleiu, Monsieur Bonacieux and Felton. David injected all three with good comic timing, but shone as the almost panto villain, Cardinal Richeleiu. The facial expressions and physicality were very funny. David's vocal delivery was spot-on, with excellent projection.

Louise Doyle played Milady, Cardinal Richeleiu's right-hand woman. Louise was able to display various accents throughout convincingly, and was able to use her charm to manipulate the other characters. She formed a great partnership with David's Richeleiu, always trying to one up each other.

Ian Lancaster played a number of roles, including Lord Buckingham, Dog, Travers, Barman and Pub Landlord. Each character was totally different, with Ian's work as Lord Buckingham being very funny. He played the posh toff very well.

David Leslie played King Louis and Captain Treville. David is a naturally funny performer, and he was able to display his comedic skills in these roles. From the drunk Captain Treville to the hippie-like King Louis, both were very funny.

Cherylyn Sparkes played both Queen Anne and Sister Mary. This was a confident performance from Cherylyn, who displayed good vocal clarity and projection. She worked well with David's King Louis, giving a good comedic partnership.

Emily Earps impressed with her comic timing in her dual roles as Constance and Kitty. Emily created two distinct characters using her voice and physicality. Her portrayal of Kitty was the stronger of the two, where Emily really proved her comedic chops. Great job!

Olivia Mannion did well with a number of smaller roles, including Louvre Guard, Courtier, Messenger and Jeweller. Olivia certainly threw herself into all these roles. Just be aware of where your audience is and your projection – particularly difficult when outdoors.

Sally Batty appeared in the ensemble scenes and played Praying Nun. The moment with Praying Nun and Milday could have been exaggerated even further for greater comic effect.

Overall, this was a good production. The comedy was good, and there was a good sense of playfulness within the production – everyone just let themselves go.

A big thank you to everyone at Frodsham Players for their kind invite and their hospitality (and for the blanket!). All the best for your next production, 'Holmes and the Ripper', later this year.

