

The Big Sleep – 20th October – The Mill At Sonning

It was late. The place was crowded. A gorgeous doll as high as a giraffe's eyebrows and packed into her tightly fitting birthday suit was slumped in a chair. Nearby, a smuck lay with more lead in him than a chock-a-block pencil case. This meant only one thing... The Big Sleep had hit the stage at Sonning.

Apart from some first night hesitations, this creatively stage and directed adaption of Raymond Chandler's novel was a joy to watch. As with Chandler's stories, it's the style and pace of the dialogue that makes them so original and this production didn't disappoint.

Simon Merrells was excellent as private eye, Phillip Marlowe, ably supported by five talented actors, playing with equal skill and enthusiasm, a plethora of characters in this story of dirty dealings, dames and danger.

This was a great night out and a must see for all Chandler and theatre fans.

Cliveden Rock 11 – 6th August – Cliveden Paddock

Being a Beatles' fan and not an Abba aficionado. I was a little disappointed that the Fab Four were on before the Super Swedes. I was all set to put up with 'The Magic of Abba', Voulez-Vous'ing and SOS'ing while my family and I tucked into our picnic and waited for 'The Cavern Beatles' to Twist and Shout and show them how it's done.

Unfortunately it appeared to be only me and few aging mop tops who were miffed by the scheduling, because although 'The Cavern Beatles' were a terrific tribute band, what you might call the 'Fabricated Four', when the pseudo seventies super-group took to the stage, you could tell who the majority of the crowd had come to see.

Even as I stood with the near perfect Beatles sound recreated by the Mersey based bogus band still ringing in my ears, I couldn't stop myself from busting a few 'dad dance' moves. Bopping to the likes of Mama Mia, Supertrooper and Money, Money, Money, I succumbed to the sea of nostalgic enthusiasm that swept across the Cliveden Paddocks in waves of spangled spandex, way-out wigs and not one bit of embarrassment.

Being a warm balmy evening, somewhat unusual for this time of the year, picnics were enjoyed at a more leisurely pace than past inclement years and while some relaxed in the many foldaway chairs, the young, and like me, the young at heart, took to the dance area to burn some calories, strain a few muscles and regret a few leg kicks.

Personal musical tastes aside; this was another very enjoyable opening Saturday night of this popular local summer event. A fun and friendly evening that ended with a tremendous firework display, that was a sparkly and over the top as the Scandinavian pretenders on the stage.

Bugsy Malone - The Musical – 31st May - Theatre Royal

Apart from the traditional and excusable first night nerves and the odd technical gremlin, Songtime Theatre Academy's buoyant production of this popular stage show fully deserved the appreciative cheers and applause from a highly entertained audience.

With a cast entirely made up of enthusiastic youngsters who weren't born when the original film, or the DVD for that matter, came out, this is one of those shows that makes you smile from start to finish.

There were some excellent performances from the main leads, ably assisted by a promising supporting cast and chorus, some of whom were making their stage debut.

Enjoyable as this evening was, I think the show will improve with each performance. As teething problems are solved and confidence grows, this could become a showcase production for the Academy, proving that you don't need to just watch television on a Saturday night to see that Britain's got talent.