
THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL - THE PLAYHOUSE, CHELTENHAM

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A backdrop of the French Revolution with a menacing guillotine and bawdy street hustlers is the unlikely setting of a love story.

But *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Emmuska Orczy is a romantic adventure starring a lovestruck French actress, Marguerite (played by Kate Aston) and her English aristocratic lover, Sir Percy (played by Ben Perkins) who are thrown into tumult by a rampaging French army.

This production of the Broadway musical by Cheltenham Operatic and Dramatic Society had everything you could want from a show ? dancing girls at La Comedie Francaise, an egotistical French officer intent on revenge and a group of dandy young Englishmen who decide to take on the French regime by sabotaging its reign of terror.

In the first act Marguerite's theatre is closed down and she moves to England to marry Sir Percy. But their fairytale wedding is cut short when Sir Percy finds out his wife has betrayed one of his friends in France.

On his wedding night he vows to take action and assumes the pseudonym of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Ben Perkins excelled at the lead role, singing rousing songs such as *Into the Fire*, whilst swapping his country gent costume, complete with 18th century wig and breeches, for a disguise to fool the French guards.

The French officer, Chauvelin (played by Gregory Aston) was fittingly loathsome and Marguerite's despair was summed up perfectly by heartfelt songs performed passionately by Kate Aston.

This was a first for CODS on many levels - the first time Daphne Herbert had directed for them, the first time Claire Yates had choreographed and the first time Dave Whittle had conducted the orchestra.

And it was a triumph all round.

Lucy Rutherford -
