**THE LITTLE MERMAID By Roger Paine**

Converting the stage of the village hall into a grotto fathoms under the ocean for the assorted creatures who live there, as well as a ship on the surface, was a challenge. But Herstmonceux Amateur Theatrical Society’s Youth Group, Young HATS, managed to bring to life Hans Christian Andersen’s The Little Mermaid, later Walt Disney’s much-loved 1989 film, in a colourful and sparkling performance.

Director Joanna Stevens, assisted by Chris Thompson, with a no-frills set designed by Ruth Palmer, allowed the story, and the audience’s imagination, full rein. It also gave the thirty-five strong cast of boys and girls, aged seven to fifteen, including several sets of brothers and sisters, the chance to become fully involved in a manner which only youthful enthusiasm can achieve. With music and choreography directed by Linda Thompson, it was the perfect riposte to those who regard today’s youth as hung-up on television celebrity shows, glued to mobile phones or playing games on their Ipad.

The fairy tale of a mermaid, Ariel (Ruby Thomas), who falls in love with a human, Prince Eric (James Tweedy), and wants to leave the undersea court of her father, King Triton (Thomas Fox), was beautifully realised in her singing of ‘Part of Your World’. Her ocean friends, Flounder (Megan Noya) and the Caribbean crustacean, Sebastian (Sam Fantucchio), were charmingly amusing as was the seagull, Scuttle (Oliver Stevens), all flapping arms and fluffy feathers, in the joint rollicking number ’Human Stuff’. Sea-witch Ursula (Lauren Noya), and henchwomen Flotsam (Alivia Dicker) and Jetsam (Gemma Manktellow), were robustly sinister in the triumphant ‘Poor Unfortunate Souls’. The Chorus of Sailors, Sea Creatures, Gulls, and Meristers too played their part, especially when as Chefs they are chased by cleaver-wielding Chef Louis (Will Tweedy), singing ‘Les Poissons’, in the palace kitchen.

 An ebullient production by a dedicated team.

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