

HALE AND DISTRICT U3A UKUHALEE BAND



Hale U3A Ukulhalee Band with the cast of Jeeves and Wooster

Take three actors, a silver cow creamer, a large yellow duck, a gaggle of geese and a troupe of morris dancers then add the UkuHalee Band and what do you have? - a madcap production of *Jeeves and Wooster* in "*Perfect Nonsense*". Having performed as a band for over five years at care homes, dementia cafés, various luncheon clubs, birthday parties, church halls and hospitals, entertaining everyone from 0 to 90 and raising money for charity along the way, imagine our surprise when an e mail arrived from the Garrick theatre in Altrincham asking if we would like to participate in the forthcoming production of *Jeeves and Wooster*. Curious to find what this would entail we invited Barry J. C. Purves, the director, along to one of our sessions. He thought our music matched his requirements perfectly. We assumed that our role would be to play a few songs before the play started or during the interval but Barry had other ideas as we later discovered.

We spent time learning songs from the 1920/30s before rehearsals began including 'Putting On The Ritz', 'The Sun Has Got His Hat On', 'Don't Bring Lulu' and 'The Charleston' to add to others already in our repertoire. It was clear at the first rehearsal that Barry's intentions were for us to participate in the whole production, not only to provide incidental music but also to join in with the call-and-response and to take charge of props. Keeping up with the script changes at each rehearsal and requests to play a chord here or a few bars of music there to heighten tension demanded full concentration. It seemed strange not having someone to count us in especially where timings were critical. Having one eye on the script, another on the music and a third on the

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action was challenging to say the least. Equipped with jingle bells, coconuts shells, duck and train whistles, a pop gun, cymbals and a baking tray, we provided all the sound effects as well as “ooh-ing”, “aah-ing”, “woof-ing” and “miaow-ing” in all appropriate places, and not forgetting to repeat “newts” every time the word was mentioned. (No newt was harmed in the production of this play!)

Rehearsing four times a week was demanding but so much fun. The three actors were brilliant, two of them playing several roles, often alternating between male and female characters. Wooster was hilarious and so good at ad libs when one of them forgot a line. The stage set designed by Barry was fantastic. (Apart from directing at the Garrick theatre, he is also a famous Oscar and BAFTA nominated animator, wow!) By the time rehearsals were over we knew the play inside out but we still found something to laugh at every time.

On opening night dressed in our finery; the ladies in black dresses mainly bought from local charity shops and the men in dinner jackets and bow ties, it felt as though we were stepping out into the unknown but we need not have worried as all went well. Time flew by and, before we knew it, we were playing ‘The Charleston’ at the end of the show while the actors danced and performed cartwheels and leap-frog across the stage. We will never know where they found their energy from having given their all in such an action-packed show. Our strumming was almost drowned by the applause from the audience.

But what did the critics think? One wrote: “The cast clearly had as much fun producing this excellent show, as the audience did watching it. A top notch spiffing show” and another- “The UkuHalee Band were a lovely addition to the farcical nature of the piece and we particularly enjoyed their permitted responses and facial expressions at certain times in the action.”

Working with Barry, the actors and the crew was a real pleasure and everyone made us feel most welcome. It was a huge commitment and by the end of a six night run, we were exhausted. Would we do it again? You bet!

Jean Peters

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Just the Hale U3A Ukulele Band