

Goodspeed Musicals, East Haddam, CT

The Mystery of Edwin Drood, book, lyrics and music by Rupert Holmes.

Directed by Rob Ruggiero.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

"Don't Quit While You're Ahead!"

In 1985 Rupert Holmes clever adaptation of Charles Dickens' final, never-completed, novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, opened on Broadway for a long run, winning five TONY Awards and sweeping the critics into a frenzy of favorable reviews. It starred George Rose, Betty Buckley, Cleo Laine, Patti Cohenour, Howard McGillin, Judy Kuhn, Jerome Dempsey, and Rob Marshall and Donna Murphy. It ran for 622 performances. It broke new ground with its unique form: the audience is involved from the beginning and ends up voting on many elements of the ending (Dickens never really provided one). It was directed by Wilford Leach and choreographed by Graciela Daniele



The company of **The Mystery of Edwin Drood**; Photo: Diane Sobolewski

At Goodspeed Musicals in East Haddam, Connecticut, a new production featuring a cast of lesser-known performers has undertaken a new production directed by the talented Rob Ruggiero (formerly of Barrington Stage Company) and choreographed by James Gray with

Lenny Wolpe in George Rose's role as The Chairman, Paul Adam Schaefer as John Jasper, Mamie Parris in Buckley's role, Edwin Drood, Liz McCartney in Cleo Laine's role as Princess Puffer (played by Chita Rivera in the Broadway revival in 2012) and Riley Noland as the heroine, Rosa Bud. Wolpe was seen last summer in Berkshire Theatre Group's new musical, "*On Cedar Street*." He is perfect in this role as is Schaefer as the criminally inclined Jasper.

In fact the entire company is perfectly cast in their roles. While McCartney doesn't have the growl in her voice that Cleo Laine brought to Puffer, her soprano is secure and her movements are definitive. Her revelation scene with Rosa was most effective, helped by the lithe performance in the ingenue role by



Lenny Wolpe, Paul Adam Schaefer;
Photo: Diane Sobolewski



Liz McCartney as Princess Puffer; Photo: Diane Sobolewski

Noland. Her vocalism shown in the beautiful minor-key ballad "Windfall," and her stunning duet. "Perfect Strangers." with Parris's Drood,

Among the smaller, but necessary roles, the Landless siblings were beautifully played by Jetta Juriansz and Levin Valayil. Reverend Crisparkle, their guardian was undertaken beautifully by Paul Slade Smith. The town tippler, Durdles was very nicely portrayed by David Beach. Every time I've seen this show I have voted for Durdles in

some capacity and I did so this time wholeheartedly. Beach was that good in the role.

Production values for this show are first-rate. Stunning costumes by Hunter Kaczorowski perfectly define the characters wearing them. Sets by Ann Beyersdorfer make every place featured into a show of its own. Rob Denton's lighting design is excellent and effective as is the sound design by Jay Hilton. Music direction by Adam Souza is perfection highlighting the original orchestrations by the composer himself.



Jetta Juriansz, Paul Slade Smith, Levin Valayil; Photo: Diane Sobolewski

A true highlight in this company is Edwin Drood himself, played by Mamie Parris. Boyishly brilliant, her performance is a tribute to her own talent, to Betty Buckley who originated the role and to the fine work done by director Ruggiero and choreographer Gray. The whole show is a triumph for Goodspeed. A superb company in a perfect presentation equals a wonderful evening!

+ 04/18/2024 +

The Mystery of Edwin Drood plays at Goodspeed Musicals in East Haddam, Connecticut through June 2. For information and tickets go to the theater's website at www.goodspeed.org or call the box office at 860-873-8668.



Mamie Parris as Edwin Drood;
Photo: Diane Sobolewski