

Review: The Celtic Pipe Band - Mary Queen of Scots

Venue: The Theatre Royal

Date: Saturday 23 August 2014

Reviewed by Adrienne Matthews

The success of the Celtic Pipe Band's 'Braveheart' show last year helped ensure a full house at this year's offering, 'Mary Queen of Scots'. It began well enough with rousing marches from a band that lived up to its reputation for excellence.

Mary's story was a splendid choice, filled with drama, despair and intrigue and providing plenty of opportunity for the performers to show their best in a series of numbers that reflected the storyline. There were many interesting anecdotes. I had no idea, for example, that Mary spoke six languages by the age of thirteen.

Unfortunately however, narrator Mike Williams did not give the script due reverence with inconsistent and poorly modulated lines that were sometimes hard to pick up and too casually presented. The announcement of the performers prior to each number interrupted the continuity of the story and was unnecessary due to their inclusion in the programme.

It was a delight to see so many young highland dancers included in this show, from the cutest beginners through to accomplished seniors. Clearly highland dance is alive and well in this part of the world.

The Celtic Pipe Band was outstanding in every number, performing with professional commitment and precision. The show's standard overall however, slipped with the performances of the vocalists and "Blackwater" rock band. The exception was the number "Hell Bound" where the rock musicians and pipers achieved a near perfect partnership that wowed the audience.

This was a show that was good but could have been better. A Scottish narrator would have helped as would have a tightening up of the vocals and rock sections. Producer/Choreographer Helen Gilchrist and her husband, Pipe Major Bryce Gilchrist must be commended however for bringing such a dynamic project to the stage and, for the most part, creating a performance to be proud of .