It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas

Everywhere you go-

And it certainly was at Thursford, our November destination. After our usual pit stop, providing much-needed coffee and bacon butties, we set off and arrived at Thursford at high noon, giving us plenty of time to explore before the 2pm show.

There was so much to see: Dickensian shop fronts inviting you indoors to sample clothing, jewellery and of course, Christmas decorations. There was also a Santa's Grotto full of traditional seasonal creatures such as Bambi, polar bears, penguins, *Toy Story* characters and a spooky witch's cottage. Cartoon characters swung from the roof, whilst monkeys draped themselves across vintage machinery, another attraction of this place. Outside there was the Trail of Light, which took you past impressive and varied scenarios such as *Jurassic Park* and *Jungle Book*. Aslan posed majestically on the horizon as you exited via a Chinese arch. It was even more spectacular by night when fully illuminated, although part of it was closed this year. There were plenty of reasonably priced eating places and so, fully fuelled and excited, we took our seats for this year's show.

Where to start? With its cast of 120 singers and musicians, it is indeed surround sound when they appear in the aisles and across the stage. Many performers come straight from the West End and are multi -talented indeed. The instruments ranged from the fabulous Wurlitzer to the trombone, the harp to the fiddle. The music ranged from the 70s to Riverdance, accompanied by incredible costumes and dance routines. Oh those florescent flares- how did we ever get into them-and dainty dresses worn by the Irish dancers. It opened with bagpipes –what else?-but my stand out moment was when the choir sang Rodrigo's Concierto d'Aranjuez, which I recognised from *Brassed Off* but had never heard performed with vocals. It was overwhelming and reduced me to tears.

The speciality acts were marvellous this year. I'll start with the ventriloquist Steve Hewlett, or should I start with Arthur Lager, the real boss of the partnership! Arthur had a roving eye and singled out Rose in the audience for his lecherous leers, even stealing her bra. Then there was Pongo the skunk with his wicked sense of humour. Hysterical. There was Bede Nash, whirling his hula hoops round a sickening trim waist, and two fabulous skaters, Royer and Emelie, who, despite being restricted to a tiny circular stage, produced amazing spins and lifts. But I believe I am correct in saying that the two highlights were these. The first was Karina Peisker from Germany, a world class wheel gymnast who was the epitome of grace and agility. We just gazed in awe as she almost became part of the wheel herself. The other outstanding act was the Piotrowski Brothers from Poland, whose sheer strength and perfect balance defied gravity and held us spellbound. The volume of the audience reaction said it all!

It was indeed a Christmas Spectacular. It had everything-thrills but fortunately no spills, with plenty of laughter, singing and cheering throughout. We all left with our moods considerably lifted- and that's not all. The fog that had bedevilled us on the way down had also lifted and we came home in record time. Thank you to all the organisers, especially Jane, and to our trusty driver Stewart. And remember, this is just a prelude to the real thing in December, when you hang your holly wreath *on your own front door.*

Barbara Pearce