



Society : Richings Players  
Production : Panto in the Jungle  
Date : 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009  
Venue : Iver Village Hall  
Report by : Sam Webb

## Report

It is my pleasure to come and see any panto, and, in this, my 22<sup>nd</sup> pantomime visit of this season it's good to see that there is a company who are daring enough to experiment with forms of theatre and willing to try something new.

Your "directors' word" explains your beliefs about professional pantomime and how the art form has changed and been shaped over the years. Even more so now where many professional companies rotate stock shows, with the same gags, same songs and same cast members, it was good to see your company challenging these principles.

Your choice to place the action of the pantomime in a jungle was a bold one. The directors know the art form well; after all you mention, in your programme, many of the conventions of pantomime performance; 'the dame, comedy duo, evil versus good, slapstick...and audience participation'. I do feel however in your version some other conventions may have been missed or overlooked, or maybe this was part of your innovative version of the art form?

One of the main flaws was your plot, although there was a story, a quest with elements of good and evil but sometimes it seemed thin, perhaps this is because the stories we often see; Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Dick Whittington are so well known and clear with a strong sense of narrative perhaps there was a need for more clarity in the story. The jokes in the script were all very well built in at good intervals which did add to the enjoyment.

My critiques tend to comment on the show in order of performance, hopefully helping you to see & understand where I have enjoyed and

where I have challenged some of your performances or choices, so here goes;

We were presented with a colourful fresh set, which looked as if it had both been professionally designed and built by ROBIN BISHOP and ALAN OXLEY creating a good effective backdrop for all the scenes – but which was let down by the backstage member peeping out at the audience before the show had even started (keep em in the dark!). Before the overture even started the audience was entertained by some comedy and some well executed slapstick with a magazine reading Gorilla, a nice touch which excited (and scared some) audience members. Your well constructed band under the efficient direction of ANNE TORRENT (also on Keys) produced a good sound, JACK FISHER, ARDSHIR MISRAHEM, DANIEL BRYANT, PETER TORRENT, YOLANDE ELLIS, JACK WALSH, JENNIFER HILL and JAMIE SHAW squashed neatly into the pit on the floor hit the notes correctly and worked in time to accompany the actors and fill in moments of transitions. Drums were used to accompany some jokes, perhaps more percussion moments would have enhanced the comedy moment – there was one joke where the effect was a few seconds late which, unfortunately, negates the comedy effect. ROBIN BISHOP kept the musicians and actors heard and well balanced. It did seem however your sound was compressed and wasn't the best quality, it may have been the speakers or something else technical that I can't explain! Anyhow our enjoyment wasn't impaired by problems sometimes affecting other Am Dram performances such as feedback or bad microphones.

Lights were well operated by LES BREWER who created good states with contrasting colours, gobos and birdies which matched the scenes or characters performing. Perhaps one suggestion; some effects, in particular the evil thunder bolt, needed to be cued quicker and the effect seemed to last for 3 seconds when only one was needed, in turn it halted and affected the pace. Perhaps some of the fast songs could have had lighting chases added to improve the effect of the song.

JO GIBBS packed a powerful punch, with a strong and professional voice she opened the show with a well strung together pantomime medley, joined on stage by the dancers who were in time, enjoying themselves and working in unison to compliment the opening. Jo shows professionalism in her acting performance too with suitable characteristics, voice projection and diction. Jo was soon joined on stage by the comedy duo for whom the audience immediately felt affection. Their comedy accents and mannerisms were particularly well executed. The blacked faces and Bob Marley accents were close to the mark but every pantomime needs something to take the edge off our tip-toeing around political correctness and throw some humour in the mix; after all Bob Marley did like Jam Doughnuts (apparently!). We occasionally lost some lines to diction, perhaps slowing down the delivery would have assisted the audience in this matter.

There were a few moments where I felt the chorus/ensemble had some random exits from the stage, it just seemed to happen with no reason. Was this a fault of the script?

TANYA BRIDGEN showed competence and confidence but the character sometimes lacked a dynamic, and at moments, a characterisation. She may have benefited from being given some more directorial assistance on her interaction, posture and mannerisms within the role.

The evil character of Witchetty Grub was successfully portrayed by LINDA BAINBRIDGE but missed one of those conventions/traditions I talked about earlier; she frequently entered from stage right which goes against the usual pantomime tradition of the baddie entering from stage left. Linda implemented a sense of malevolence, her interaction with the audience was perfect, she also gave us her side to the story. Linda was assisted in her evil quest with some well positioned smoke which created an effective backdrop and by her evil sprits; EMILY MILLER and JOSH PEARSON.

Mabooboo played by DAVID BAINBRIDGE as the king who got caught up in the evil pantomime trap was good, however at times the character seemed slightly restrained but we understood the intentions, but his diction and expressions were first class.

WARREN PALMER, who I have had the pleasure of working with before, successfully overplayed Dee Dee, a busy explorer. His interplay and interaction with the audience was well achieved. His balance between masculine and feminine accent was excellent, a skill many panto dames fail to achieve. When Warren began his song he suffered from a timely pause between his last scripted line and the intro from the band, this affected many of the performer's songs, if the MD improved her relationship with the script this may have improved the pacing of the production.

Cara Loft, played by SARAH PINKNEY was filled with a warm stage presence and took her first entrance as an opportunity to acquaint us with a confident performance which grew when we heard an impressive singing voice used to its full potential later on in the show. Her involvement in the show also extended to assisting LEY DOBSON with some effective choreography. The moves were confident well executed, the only element of artistry which suffered in the choreography was that in some songs, the moves were often very static; the dancers nearly always stayed on the spot, there wasn't many switching of places or moving round the stage.

The audience loved the Jungle Man played by NIGEL GRAVETTE, who seemed to be a veteran of pantomime performance, his ingenious swinging entrance was a nice alternative, his costume and facial hair were appropriate to accentuate the role further.

The Love Cats provided us with an interesting and entertaining song, the performers were well spaced on stage, when dialogue came into play it was well delivered and projected by all successfully.

Before we were greeted with dancers in white for the Phil Collins number there was a long scene change, a suggestion; this dance could have been completed in UV thus covering the scene change. The Gorilla on drums was a good idea, but if there had been more of an element of surprise the gag would have worked better, maybe the drums could have been pushed on by him just before he played. However it achieved the desired effect and a rapturous round of applause; no doubt what you were after.

The second half re-energised the audience with a fabulously sung 'Wanna Be Like You', followed by Ma Winkey who managed well to complete so many name related tongue twisters. Congratulations RICHARD CAMPBELL who also worked well to establish a working relationship with Cara on stage. ALISON ELCOAT also had a chance to shine in the second act with exceptionally good diction and presence in her number - a song well complimented by the dancers. Another comedy highlight included the Baboons Bum, which tickled the children and adults alike followed by a well presented slapstick scene. The setting of this would have benefited from coming down and centre stage as it would have been easier to communicate the comedy to the audience.-The scene could have also been finished off with a comedy play off. However the juggling and play was good and added a sense of fun to the proceedings.

King Pongs presence, played well by WILL TORRENT, was assisted by his large gorilla suit, although at times his booming voice meant his diction wasn't perfect and we lost some lines, but we understood you were evil, big and to stay away!!

Before the kiss, Cara's (cod?) corpse gave us a chuckle, if this was a cod corpse it was very well executed, they are not always successful and if done badly can look very unprofessional, but not yours! The song 'Does Your Mother Know' needed to be directed slightly more to the audience in order to play the comedy further, but the lyric change was good.

Your chase scene was another well presented performance, slick and fun, as it should be, followed by a happy family reunion, all characters reacted appropriately, as they also did in 'Give a Little Love', a welcome extension from the usual change from evil to good.

Your costumes were creative and appropriate, as was hair and make up, all helping to create a professional picture. Well done to all those involved in a job well done (who if I wrote their names would turn this into War and Peace).

In conclusion, I know I have written quite a lot and my notes have been mixed I hope you find what I have written constructive. I think you had a very good idea, but feel your script would need to be workshopped a few times to find the right plot, many of the ideas within the plot no doubt implemented by Directors DAVID BAINBRIDGE and MICHAEL LUCAS were well conceived and thought out, (you know your audience) just sometimes a slicker delivery would have made more of a point and brought the ideas out further. I felt some of your recorded music could have been replaced by the band and at times a play off or on was missing. I think you should be very proud of yourself for taking on a challenge like this. Well done to all those other backstage and behind the scenes who I have not mentioned. In the meantime, sit back and be proud, you performed such a professional show which your audiences love, and surely that's all that matters!

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Feedback on this review from any cast members or creatives would be appreciated, or if you have any questions or queries or just for a chat please get in touch via [sammywebby@gmail.com](mailto:sammywebby@gmail.com) or call me on 07899992772.