

## **DICK WHITTINGTON – TOTNES AODS – CIVIC HALL – JANUARY 2012**

**Dir : Rich Lea Chor : Faye Butler MD : Tim Higgs**

**Script : Gail Lowe (NODA Pantomimes)**

This script provided an unusual take on the traditional story, with many characters unfamiliar and a storyline that was new. I have to admit to not liking the script. The story was very different to the usual Dick Whittington (which was probably its attraction) but I am afraid I prefer my panto stories traditional. It was fairly off the wall in places, and at the start difficult to follow. However, why it suited TAODS, was that it had a whole collection of motley characters who were amusing to watch, and it certainly amused the audience.

There were some good performances and it was nice to see familiar Totnes stalwarts such as Dave Waistnidge (Sarah the Cook) and Andy Gould (Bosun Bowleg) back on stage after an absence. Comedy was safely in their hands along with Richard Boys and Simon Harris who played a very comical pair of buffoons. The custard pie scene was well handled by them. Nicky Whitby played the Baddie, Esmerelda, for all she was worth. This script mutes the King Rat character into something of an accident prone servant to Esmerelda, but he was well played by Robert Fagg.

Fairy Bowbells is transformed into the cat in this script and Muirenn Sutherland played well alongside Amy Robinson who really looked the part of Dick Whittington. Alice Fitzwarren was played with a hint of steeliness by Aretha Hinchcliffe. I wasn't sure about her main costume however. I could understand why she was dressed in modern tomboy style gear, but it was at odds with the rest of the costuming.

You can always rely on John Parker to give us a surreal performance and so it was as The Sultan, ably supported by Emelya Robinson as the Sultana. They were very entertaining.

The company coped with the musical numbers very well indeed. Singing was strong and the choice of songs very good. The young leads sang very well as did the comedy characters. I have to say the band was superb. It was probably the best pantomime band I have heard at Totnes, which produced a very good sound indeed.

Congratulations to the 17 year old MD. Sound levels were good, but I must admit I prefer radio mikes to be on for the dialogue as well as the songs. Although the dialogue was perfectly audible, the voices suddenly boomed out when the singing started, and this led to a disparity in sound between dialogue and song. Yes, mikes need to be turned up for the singing, but on balance I prefer them also to be on for dialogue at a lower level.

The young chorus (less people on stage than usual) were well drilled and the simple choreography was presented smoothly by them. They smiled and were well disciplined on stage.

The simple set worked well and combined with the costumes, produced a satisfactory visual feel to the show. It was a shame that a front cloth couldn't have been used instead of the blacks that constantly came in and out, but I appreciate that get in time constraints and budgets probably had an impact here.

Helpful Criticisms ? I have a little list !! Please do try to have musical entrances (and sometimes exits) for cast members. This helps them to bring the show on with them and take the show off with them. It creates better impact. Also there needed to be more percussion involvement with prat falls, and comedy. For instance, the slosh scene was conducted without any sound effects or noise. The fight scenes should have been underpinned with music for more effect and atmosphere. There should have been music to cover blackouts and scene changes as most of these were conducted in silence.

So, a definite improvement on last years pantomime and it was evident that a lot of hard work had gone into the preparation of the show. However my gold star this year goes to the young MD and his fabulous band. I could have listened to them all night.