

DISTRICT 1

SOUTH DERBYSHIRE

KEITH SCOTT-SAVAGE

CANTERBURY TALES

Review by: Keith Scott-Savage
Presented by: **THE MARLOW PLAYERS**
Venue: Darley Abbey Village Hall
Performance Dates: 1st to 5th December 2009
Director: Suzi Illston

A most innovative production of this adaptation of Chaucer's best known piece, and the intimacy of the venue certainly enhanced the production. Without scenery and very little in the way of props, it was a flashback to the days when entertainment was played using only the acting ability of the cast. The Marlowe's certainly gave us a very entertaining, amusing, ribald evening. There were six individual tales, all performed with flair, deft timing and energy. My favourite being the final item, "The Millers Tale", which had the audience in stitches. Great credit must go to Suzi Illston whose directorial ability shone throughout.

It would be unfair to name any individual actors, except to say their performance gives great acclaim to the whole company, "A Team Marlowe Display". Well done all.

THE PANTOMIME ADVENTURES OF SINBAD

Review by: Keith Scott-Savage
Presented by: **KALEIDOSCOPE PLAYERS**
Venue: Guildhall Theatre, Derby
Performance Dates: 3rd to 6th December 2009
Director: Tina Webster
Musical Director: James Rayner
Choreography: Josephine Walker, Natalie Weetman

The classy in house script written by Tina Webster and Toby Bradford proved that amateur writers can be equally as proficient as any professional. Well crafted with a host of laugh lines and gags, ably supported by a young and well rehearsed cast, Sinbad made for one of the most entertaining pantomimes I have seen in recent years.

Good performances by Hayley Heanue and Mattie Green as Sinbad and Princess Saffron gave the romantic aspect. The comedy side was handled in slick style by Phil Stanley and Paul Walker as Ali and Kazam, with solid support from Barry Smith as Dame Sheba and lovely cameo spots by Toby Bradford. Boos abounded for Julie Black as the evil Ayesha, not forgetting Amy and Hannah Bradford as the loveable camel! The company enthusiastically supported the principals as the show maintained a swinging pace throughout. Superbly costumed, great credit goes to the costume team. A well balanced band, and a real bonus, the show was just the right length.

Thank you Kaleidoscope for a most entertaining evening

DISTRICT 2

NORTH DERBYSHIRE

JOYCE HANDBURY

GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS

Review by: Joyce Handbury
Presented by: **BOLSOVER DRAMA GROUP YOUTH SECTION**
Venue: The Assembly Rooms, Bolsover
Performance Dates: 8th to 9th. December 2009
Director: Donna Knowles
Producer: Wendy Blunt
Musical Director: Dawn Shearwood
Choreographer: Lianne Brunt, Lisa Brunt, Toni Fullwood

This is the first pantomime the youth section have performed in their 13 year history and for many of the young people it will be their first time on stage. The pantomime is a far cry from the traditional story of Goldilocks as the royal family of Beargonia have been turned into bears - Father Bear (the King) played by Brian Toner, Mother Bear (the Queen) played by Rachel Ford and Baby Bear (the Prince) mischievously played by Joel Barnett. This transformation was brought about by Katie Bridges who as the evil witch Frogmella condemned the bears to spending their lives foraging for food in the woods. As ever, Fairy Good delightfully portrayed by Kayley Barnett comes to the rescue by giving them a magic cooking pot. Frogmella is determined to acquire it and enlists the help of ex-game show hosts turned villains, Ant & Dec, characterised in great Geordie style by Laura Hulett and Sophie Cadywould. Lianne Brunt was lovely as Goldilocks and the duet My Guy with Matthew Allen as Igor was excellent. Kieran Buck was first-rate as the Professor and both he and Fairy Good did a splendid rendition of Anything You Can Do. The star of the show was undoubtedly James Sheppard as Dame Dolly. His comic timing was superb as were his many ad libs with the audience. Oh and I mustn't forget Buttercup, the cow, skilfully manoeuvred by Sophie Clifford and Charlotte Blunt. All the principals together with a very enthusiastic chorus made for a most enjoyable evening. Congratulations to the Production Team and indeed all who were in any way involved.



COMING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Preview by: Phil Williams
resented by: **SPOTLIGHT THEATRE SCHOOL**
Venue: Sandfield Theatre Nottingham
Performance dates: 19th Dec
Director: Amanda Hall
Musical Director: Ray Mcleod
Choreographers: Amanda Hall, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, Jess Royce

This was another newly formed youth group with their first production, using a compilation of music and drama items based on a Christmas theme. These ranged from the older traditional to more modern songs and sketches exploring life at Christmas time. The production team achieved a good balance using the more experienced performers to very good effect while allowing the less experienced to demonstrate their emerging talents. On stage there was certainly plenty of promising talent, not least Jess, Lauren, Ami, Sophie and Natasha for the girls and Sam, Liam, Luke and Zak for the boys. There were many fine musical items both individually and collectively and these were interspersed with well performed verse and comedy moments, especially the Seniors Nativity which was very well done. The costumes set and props all suited the occasion and the effective lighting helped to set the various scenes. This was a very promising start with congratulations to all concerned. The hard work which must have been put in by tutors and cast certainly paid off.

CINDERELLA

Preview by: Phil Williams
Presented by: **NOTTINGHAM ARTS THEATRE**
Venue: Nottingham Arts Theatre
Performance dates: 5th to 13th Dec 09
Director: Maggie Andrew
Musical Director: Graham Anderson
Choreographer: Becky Langford

This was not fully traditional pantomime as we had a male Prince and Dandini with female Ugly Sisters, but it was completely traditional for fun and entertainment and a very good production. Maggie made full use of the script and the many assorted characters within it. There were plenty of good popular songs, all well arranged and interpreted taking account of the music and lyrics. The talented principals were all in good voice, with lovely performances from Beth Hickling (Cinderella), Rob White (Prince), Lewis Barlow (Dandini) and Ruth Terry (Fairy Godmother), a "wicked" performance from Irene Starkie (Baroness) and humour in plenty from Mike Pearson (Buttons) Sarah Lucas and Jen Smith (Ugly Sisters). Becky and the young dance team provided plenty of quality visual entertainment. Costumes, lighting and efficient back stage work (particularly for the excellent pumpkin/coach transition scene) all helped, and it was great to hear all the words! Super entertainment, the audience loved it.



HONK

Preview by: Phil Williams
Presented by: Erewash Musical Society Youth Group
Venue: Freisland Performing Arts Centre Sandiacre
Performance dates: 11th to 12th Dec 09
Director: Christine Oakden
Musical Director: Sarah Berryman
Choreographer: Carol Lawson

This was the first production of the newly formed youth group, but that was hard to believe from the performance, so well did they work together in achieving such a successful end result. The show was well prepared and the production team certainly new how to get the best out of the cast yet keep the fun aspect as well. There was plenty of talent on stage and I am sure we will be seeing many of the cast in senior groups over the coming years. Everyone deserves congratulations on their individual performances, especially Laura Allen (Ida) with such expressive acting and interpretation and Tom Hopcroft (Bullfrog) who gave such a fine confident performance. There is plenty of scope for character development and that was certainly demonstrated on stage from all the cast. The choreography was neatly done, matching the capability of the cast very well. Lighting, set and props were simple but effective and they were more than adequate for the occasion. All concerned should be very proud to have achieved so much in a relatively short time, and it certainly bodes well for the stage with groups such as this providing our performers for future shows.



SANTA'S PANTO

Review by: Anne Key-Huckerby
Presented by: **TENNYSON AMATEUR PLAYERS**
Venue: St Mary's Church Hall, Mablethorpe.
Performance Dates: 4th December 2009
Director: Moira Love

Written mainly by the Director, this panto was great fun both for those on stage and the audience. Briefly the story told how Santa's Toyland was being undermined by Nasty Nora and her aide, Evil Elf. Mrs Santa provided much of the comedy along with C.O.Eddy and the King of Toyland. The Principal Boy was Caspian with the charming young Lily the Pink and the Queen all singing very pleasantly. During the show we enjoyed a number of very familiar songs and interesting dance routines which included some tap dances. The chorus comprised seven young members; their Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer was particularly appealing. Solo numbers from Ian Christopher and a lady introduced as 'Diva Betty' added much to the show. The costumes were quite delightful and the technical things were in good hands. Happily Santa finally won the day!

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN

Review by: Anne Key-Huckerby
Presented by: **THE LOUTH PLAYGOERS**
Venue: Riverhead Theatre, Louth
Performance Dates: 9th December 2009
Director: Sue Soper

It was the first time I had seen the stage version of E Nesbit's famous book. The set was wonderful in that its ingenious design meant all the important areas could be easily revealed with no pauses in the action. The sound, lighting and other special effects were a huge feature of this fascinating play, and the props and costumes were suitable for the era. In all, there were 26 members of the cast and only about a dozen were adults. All played their respective roles admirably with Denise Padbury (Mother) being particularly noteworthy together with John Elliot as Perks, the railway porter. It was he who was responsible for the narrative. The three main children were Lucy Vickers (Roberta), Ross Carrick {Peter} and Martha Holt as Phyllis the night I attended. They gave very polished performances. So did all six of the youngsters who played the Perks' children. This was truly memorable drama.

PYGMALION

Review by: Anne Key-Huckerby
Presented by: **HORNCASTLE THEATRE COMPANY**
Venue: Lion Theatre, Horncastle
Performance Dates: 11th December 2009
Director: Chris Byrne

A superb cloth showing Covent Garden was created by Pete Swift. Behind this was a dual box set of Higgins' Study and Mrs Higgins' Drawing Room with excellent lighting indicating which was currently being used. This ploy worked very well. Granted this is a very 'wordy' play and there were times when I felt the action was rather slow. Having said that, there were very pleasing portrayals from Nancy Byrne (Eliza), Vicki Head (Mrs Higgins) and Sheena Liversidge as Mrs Pearce. Gwyn Williams excelled as Col. Pickering while Jon Cooke was quite sound as Prof. Higgins and Mark Emmerson's role as Alfred Doolittle was good. All the rest of the cast gave pleasing support. A very entertaining production.

SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

Review by: Anne Key-Huckerby
Presented by: **RETFORD O.S.**
Venue: Retford Little Theatre
Performance Dates: 12th December 2009
Director: Liz Williams
Musical Director: Martin Yates
Choreographer: Dawn Denman and Jo Staples

I'll start with the dwarfs, all of whom performed beautifully. Not only did they look good, but they clearly enjoyed taking part. Sarah-Leigh Ilett was awesome as the evil Queen Avarice while Gabriella Williams shone as Snow White. Her singing and movement are equally pleasing. Peter Cox's role as Prince Ferdinand was excellent and the trio who played Chuckles, Justice Quill and Scribbles were responsible for much of the hilarity. The rest of the main characters and chorus were strong in support. We enjoyed several dance routines from the Dawn Staples School of Dance. Here we had plenty of variety from ballet to acrobatic movement. The choice of songs was laudable and the five-piece band's accompaniment was very good. The set was fine with notable special effects and lighting. The costumes were suitably colourful and attractive. Well done.

PIZZA, FRIES, GHOSTS AND LIES

Review by: Anne Key-Huckerby
Presented by: **SPALDING ADOS**
Venue: South Holland Arts Centre
Performance Dates: 20th November 2009
Directors: Brett Moore and Mark Yates

This very unusual play was written by one of the co-directors, Brett Moore, and it was much appreciated by the audience. It's a mixture of paranormal intrigue, farce, mystery and occasionally humour of a pantomime-style. I found it rather reminiscent of Rag Week productions from my student days. The technical aspects, especially the sound effects, were in good hands and the set was robustly constructed to include a window revealing all sorts of weird activity out of doors. Perhaps more could have been made of this excellent feature. All the actors revelled in their respective roles, be they the spooks who came to life or the two couples who decided to hold a séance with astonishing repercussions. They worked well together moving about the stage with ease. The plot was very different, and with some judicious 'tweaking' here and there, this play should prosper on the amateur stage...maybe even more. Well done!



THE HOLLY & THE IVY

Review by: Peter Breach
Presented by: Sleaford Little Theatre
Venue: The Playhouse, Sleaford
Performance dates: 2nd to 5th December 2009
Director: Diane Williams

This was not the usual 'fun and frolics' type of play one usually finds being performed at this time of year. However, with clever direction and the combined efforts of the cast and crew, what resulted was a thought provoking and entertaining production that contained both humour and pathos. The play, set in 1947, is about a family trying to celebrate Christmas whilst wrestling with the divisive issue of who is to provide care for an ageing parent. This was a well cast production with fine performances from Emma Albuixech (playing Jenny), Mary Rudkin (as Bridget), Joanne Moules (as Mary) and Hayley Baker (as Margaret), all of whom spoke clearly and delivered their lines with confidence. I was much taken with the attention that had been given to the set design, choice of costumes and props all of which really matched the period.



PRODUCTION: DICK WHITTINGTON

Review by: Peter Breach
Presented by: The Langtoft Players
Venue: Langtoft Village Hall
Performance dates: 8th, 9th, 10th & 12th December 2009
Director: Andrew Clingo

For this production Langtoft Players chose to use a traditional recipe to provide their seasonal entertainment for the community. Firstly they selected a very good script that contained an abundance of puns and one-liners, this was blended enthusiastically by a large cast of all ages and spiced with some very well presented musical numbers and dance routines. They included several references to local places and personalities that went down exceedingly well. I had seen clog dancing in a pantomime before but keeping rhythm with the slapping of flip-flops was new to me. There was some very good use of make-up, particularly in respect of the Dame, whose costume was also fabulously way over the top. It has to be acknowledged that this company knows its audience and is quite prepared to provide the sort of entertainment that is going to be well received. No wonder they play to capacity audiences who leave the venue in high spirits. All credit to them for their endeavours.



DISTRICT 6A

NORTH LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND

MARTIN TAILBY

WAIT UNTIL DARK

Review by: Roy Smith
Presented by: **FESTIVAL PLAYERS**
Venue: Loughborough Town Hall
Performance Dates: 30th September to 3rd October 2009
Director: Pauline Inkley

This is a taut thriller where a strong cast, combined with a well conceived set by Andrew McGowan and atmospheric lighting beautifully sustained the mounting suspense as the complicated plot unravelled. Laura Orton gave a very convincing performance as the blind girl, harassed by three unscrupulous criminals posing as police officers, played with assurance by Nick Grainger, Jeremy Malpas and particularly nasty Steve Illidge, all of whom were desperate to find a doll containing a consignment of drugs. Well directed by Pauline Inkley.

DISTRICT 6B

SOUTH LEICESTERSHIRE & LEICESTER

CHRISTINE CLARKE

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Review by: Christine Clarke
Presented by: **KIBWORTH THEATRE COMPANY**

A good community festive production that played to packed houses, which because of its complex content, stretched both the abilities of the players and the limited resources of the venue. There were however, many highlights that drew warm responses from the audience. It was well costumed and supported by a close knit musical ensemble amongst whom I would have to mention the controlled playing of the Flugelhorn. On the first night the prompt was perhaps too intrusive. Well done to the production team for presenting this production and I look forward to your next show.

DISTRICT 7

NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

KEVIN SHEEN

ALADDIN

Review by: Teresa Webb
Presented by: **ECLIPSE PERFORMING ARTS**
Venue: The Baptist Church, Corby
Performance Dates: 6th – 11th December 2009
Director: Gavin R Mills
Musical Director: Paul Headland
Choreographer: Angela McManus

This pantomime cast gave their audience everything they needed for a good, fun night out just before Christmas. Performed in a church, the minimalist scenery worked very well due to the fact that the cast were prepared for every eventuality, knowing that each night of the performance would be in a different venue. Kevin Sheen headed the cast as Widow Twankey, using every nuance possible to get the audience on his side. I loved his character with her lilting Welsh accent and naughty child expressions. A very attractive principal boy (Donna Mills) with a good singing voice, partnered by a pretty Princess (Shona McKinnon) with a cheeky Wishee Washee (Gavin R. Mills) and nasty Abanazar (Joe O'Neil) gave an excellent line-up of principals. Karen Sheen gave a strong performance as Slave of the Ring and a different interpretation of Genie of the Ring was well played by Connor Wilson. The rest of the cast gave good support with their singing and reactions throughout the show. Gavin R. Mills' script was slick and Paul Headland's band was excellent, giving all the atmospheric links and underscores so often missed in amateur pantomimes. Good costumes and make up all helped to make this a most enjoyable show. Thank you for a lovely evening.

JACK & THE BEANSTALK

Review by: Kevin Sheen
Presented by: **CORBY AMATEUR THEATRICAL SOCIETY**
Venue: Lodge Park School, Corby
Performance Dates: 27th to 30th December 2009
Director: Adele Logue
Musical Director: Barbara Hockey
Choreographer: Becky Askew

This production was extremely enjoyable although I felt the cast did not have a strong enough script to work with. Having said that I was very impressed with the Direction from Adele Logue (she knows her stuff) and also the Choreography and Musical Direction from Becky Askew and Barbara Hockey respectively. I did note that Barbara even had time to double up with some harmony singing during 'She's so lovely' which was the musical highpoint of the show. Craig Machar delivered a good performance as the evil, yet strangely likeable, Lord D'evil and was the perfect foil for the Good Fairy (comically played by Janet Askew). The comedy duo of Bodgitt and Legitt (Chuck Middleton and Naomi Galway) played their parts well and held their comic accents throughout. There was a tendency for some of their delivery to get lost however as they had a habit of talking

over each other when they had the opportunity to ad-lib.

It was nice to see new faces in the society coming to the fore and I take my hat off to Abbie Stanford (Jack) and Emma Hall (Princess Sophie) for their delightful performances.

Audience participation is an integral part of any Panto and whilst Kevin Aitken (The King – a very good ‘put upon’ performance), Craig Machar and Andy Hall (the most delightfully repulsive Dame I have ever had the good fortune to see) can obviously engage with the audience with ease, it was nice to see youngsters like Kane Duroe (comical throughout) begin to learn this art. However, I would suggest he learn to ‘talk’ to the audience more instead of relying on them to know that the ‘flapping’ of his hands means ‘shout louder’.

Praise must also go to the set designers and Back-stage crew who did extremely well considering the constraints of the venue. The dancers too were impressive throughout (particularly Zoe Gracie) though I felt they could have been challenged a little more considering the modern music chosen for the dance numbers.

All in all an enjoyable performance.

DISTRICT 8

SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE & MILTON KEYNES

NANETTE LOVELL

THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

Review by: Nanette Lovell

Presented by: **GUILSBOROUGH MUSIC AND DRAMA SOCIETY**

Performance Dates: 5th December 2009

Venue: Guilsborough Village Hall

Director: Pam Townsend

I always look forward to a Guilsborough production as it's always great! This production of "Wind in the Willows" was brilliant. What a talented group of people they are. The four leading characters of Toad (David O'Neil), Rat (Naomi Brandon-Jones), Mole (Angela Bumford) and Badger (Simon Rayner) were quite simply excellent. They were well supported by the rest of the company who played the various numerous parts in this fast moving production. Special mention to the children who played the rabbits, fieldmouse, and hedgehogs - they sang so well and were well in character! A good many of the songs were composed locally by Roger Brandon-Jones, Eric Johnson and John Brooks. Guilsborough are so lucky to have many excellent singers in the company. The costumes were excellent and the set had to be seen to be believed. Any professional theatre would be proud to have a set of this quality. Director, Pam Townsend, must be so, so proud of this production. Congratulations to everyone involved.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Review by: Nanette Lovell

Presented by: **MILTON KEYNES AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY**

Venue: Stantonbury Theatre

Director: John Dowell

Musical Director: James Clark

Choreographer: Juliet Ratnage

I always look forward to seeing MKAOS's panto and this year was no exception. From the opening scene to the grand finale this was a truly great panto - a magical experience for all age groups. Excellent performances from a talented cast led by the one and only John Dowell as the Dame - Madame Baggy! Good and evil played by Juliet Ratnage (Fairy Rose) and Vicky Amies (Evilene) worked well together as did all of the company. A very strong performance by Steve Clark as Gaston and a very funny Stephen Johnson as Floppy. A brilliant Beast played by Simon Page, Belle (Michelle Johnson) and Prince (Jodie Commercial) made a fairy tale couple and Richard Parker, Prof. Craquepotte, Belle's Dad completed the excellent principal line-up. The ensemble of Townsfolk and Courtiers were an enthusiastic bunch.

Special mention to the delightful little girls as Fairy Rose's helpers and the great group of young ladies who performed a brilliant can can.

The set was colourful and the costumes out of this world - the walk down was beautifully costumed as we have to expect from this fabulous company. The music and sound were excellent - not always easy when you are working with pre-recorded music. The writer and director, John Dowell (yes he played the Dame as well!) together with Kevin Amies (producer) must be so proud of this production and rightly so.

Congratulations to everyone involved with this year's panto - here's to 2010.