

Dick Whittington 2019

Dick Whittington, to my knowledge, is one of the few pantomimes which are based on actual events and folk tales. Richard (Dick) Whittington has managed to retain most of its truth as he was indeed the four times lord mayor of London in the late 1300's/early 1400's. The tale has developed slightly over the years with the inclusion of immortal characters such as a fairy and a talking sewer rat but the main structure of the narrative all rings true – he was employed as a tradesman in London before eventually becoming mayor, he embarked on a voyage to Morocco (which saw him return with exotic fabrics to trade), being framed for theft, his wife was indeed Alice Fitzwarren (the daughter of a tradesman) and he was renowned for being regularly accompanied by his pet cat.

During his time as mayor, Richard Whittington campaigned for the paupers with much of his time and efforts being driven by supporting and aiding the deprived residents of London. He built a maternity hospital for unmarried mothers and to this day the Whittington Maternity Hospital still stands on London's Highgate Hill, a significant location in the tale.

So, that's the history lesson – what about Bramley's Pantomime?

What a happy Pantomime this was, with lots of enthusiasm and plenty of smiles. The show opened with Fairy Bowbells who was delightfully played by Jane Brown, and Queen Rat menacingly played by Nicki Knightley, who had the audience booing from the start. Special mention to Jane's song at the end of Act 1, "I Can Hear the Bells" – how suitable for this pantomime.

The action continued on the streets of London, where the company got the show off to a good start with a rousing variation of Hairspray's "Good Morning Baltimore" . Katie Evans was a charming Alice Fitzwarren – pretty, with an excellent singing voice - one of the best Principal Girls I've seen this season. There was a good rapport between her and Dick Whittington, very well played by Kristina Fielding. Both these principals had excellent stage presence, well done.

Sarah the Cook was in the capable hands of Gary Holmes, who immediately had us in the palm of her hands especially when she gave out sweets. What a good supply of costumes and wigs which suited her outgoing personality. There was very good audience participation between Sarah and her son Idle Jack, who I liked very much and so did the audience, a good portrayal by Joe Smith. As the Dame was a cook, it might have been nice to include a messy baking scene? Maybe next time?

Tommy the Cat, played by Jamie Young, was not done in the traditional "purring, on all fours" style – this was far more interesting- he could even talk (but only if you were in the know). And what fabulous makeup – I believe Zoe Taylor was responsible?

Further support was ably supplied by Alderman Fitzwarren, Jeff Allman, and Captain Cod, Peter Coulby, both of whom had strong singing voices and perfect pompous delivery. As an usual twist to the story, Mrs Fitzwarren made an appearance at the end to perform a delightful duet with her husband. Last but not least, a very stern Town Crier, Zoe Taylor.

I have to make a special mention of Holly Smith – at 5.00pm Emma Whitehead, who should have been playing the Princess of Morocco, was taken ill. Holly stepped in at VERY short notice to deliver a flawless performance, including a song & dance number.

All the support from the rest of the cast, as Londoners, sailors & islanders and the 3 children, as rats, made up that extra ingredient to make this pantomime a winner. The sets were very good, enhanced by atmospheric lighting and appropriate and timely sound effects thanks to the Stage Manager, Trevor Smith, and his sound, lighting, props and scenery team. Loved the collapsing ship in the storm – who guessed that was going to happen.

There was some simple but lovely choreography thanks to Dean Patrick and Andrew Lockwood, set off by colourful costumes, thanks to Heather, Carolyn, Tracy and Sue. The musical accompaniment was excellent and a great choice of songs – so well done to the Musical Director, Robyn Saunders. It was nice to see the Baby Shark song done in a suitable place – under the sea !

This is the fourth Pantomime I have seen at Bramley and they have gone from strength to strength. A huge amount of credit for that should go to the Director, Dean Patrick. He seems to have a talent for bringing the best out of a Society and delivering a cracking pantomime. Well done, Dean.

Thank you Bramley Parish Theatre Players for a great evening's entertainment, and for making us feel welcome.

Review by Brian Craven of NODA.