



THE
ROSE
BOWL
AWARDS
FOR AMATEUR
DRAMA & MUSIC

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| <u>Name of Society</u> | Hanham Folk Centre Players |
| <u>Name of Production</u> | Dick Whittington |
| <u>Date</u> | 6 th January 2005 |
| <u>Venue</u> | Hanham Folk Centre |
| <u>Adjudicator</u> | June Rayner |

Dick Whittington makes his way to London where he begins work in Alderman Fitzwarren's shop. He meets and falls in love with Alice Fitzwarren. In this script, after becoming Lord Mayor of London, Dick decides to go to sea and he joins Alice, Sarah, the cook and others on board the Saucy Sal. After numerous adventures and the best efforts of King Rat to destroy the lovers, they make their way safely back to London.

The pantomime is a traditional one which calls for cross dressing, lots of knockabout comedy, magic and romance. It must be colourfully staged with amusing and gaudy costumes. It should employ dance, song and plenty of amusing effects. A lively pace and good continuity are essential.

PRESENTATION

The foundation of the set was a plain backdrop with long rostra running across the back of the stage forming a modest, but very useful upper level. Additions or substitutions appeared creating such locations as the shop, the Guildhall, the dock, or an exotic palace. A drop-at two was painted as a desert. Alternatively, drapes were used for some scenes. There were some nicely humorous touches such as Sarah's bloomers flying from the ship's mast. The shipping scenes were atmospheric. Even more so was the clever undersea scene where fish 'swam' back and forth. Scenery became richly decorative in the Guildhall and the Sultan's palace.

Properties were humorously supplied – the rabbit and mallet being particularly funny. The extensive property demand was fully and imaginatively met.

This was a carefully thought out, well planned contribution to the show and the changes were so well managed that continuity excelled. A creative effort from all concerned.

LIGHTING

Equipment was modest but the team were able to distribute the light over the stage satisfactorily and to help in the creation of atmosphere with small changes in colour. The pink 'fairy' lighting was charming and there was a horrid green light on King Rat. Cueing was alert. Raise the light in the auditorium when events take place there. Don't leave any actors in the dark. The strobe lighting worked well.

SOUND AND EFFECTS

Pick up was from low stand mikes onstage. Except that they picked up footfalls, this was perfectly satisfactory. Reproduction was carefully adjusted and audibility was generally good. Recorded music was used at times. When the show uses singers it is probably better to use instrumental music at intervals rather than songs. Comedy effects from percussion added greatly to the nonsense and were immaculately timed.

COSTUME

There was a very extensive contribution from wardrobe who were careful to create characters in the traditional way. Dick looked a little too neat in figure. Costume might have created a more substantial appearance. This was even more evident when he wore those dreadful shorts – far too skimpy for a young hero. He needed a tunic. His hat was unflattering. He needed more sex appeal about him. Alice, whose appearance was quietly sweet, might also have been given something more romantic, softer. All the little girls in the audience want to imagine themselves as Alice, don't they? A very pretty Rose Fairy was presented and King Rat looked splendid. The team excelled in the Sultan's Palace scene and the Guildhall scene was rich in colour. Sailors were splendid – the silly parrot amused.

The Dame, who wore a different costume every time she appeared, looked amusing and colourful.

MAKE UP

Wigs were appropriate, the Dame's changing with her costumes. Everyone tried hard to achieve brightly lively faces.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

As has already been mentioned, SMs worked swiftly, quietly to achieve rapid changes. Excellent.

PRODUCTION

First, a word about the script which created Dick as Lord Mayor of London at the end of Act I and then sent him off to sea in Act II. Surely this is to put the cart before the horse and to spoil the climax of the story. But there are so many alterations in the script that it is impossible to be certain whose change this was.

This was a well-prepared show which went into considerable detail. An old story was successfully combined with popular songs, songs of the right quality and style to suit the nature of the show. Numbers had been securely learnt and the MD gave supportive guidance throughout. His group of instrumentalists had been selected with a knowledgeable musical ear to create a warmly rhythmic sound and sustained sounds equally well. The bass guitar was a good choice in this respect. Musically, the show went smoothly.

Opening with a startling flash and the appearance of a very prompt fairy we were led into *Who Will Buy?* This was a good choice but the dance would have better performed by the children able to bounce across the stage than by adults. While choreography was responsive to the mood of a scene or a number, it was, in general too balletic. Choreography in shows is based upon modern and traditional dance and it often needs to incorporate a narrative element. Dancing was most entertaining when characterful as in the most successful hornpipe routine where dancers smiled happily or when the sultry and fascinating members of the hareem were presented. The tap routine was lively. Dancers were well prepared and able to perform what was asked of them.

It is important to set up a major character's entrance so that it makes an impact. The Dame's entrance was extremely poor. She seemed simply to appear rather than make a big entrance. Better business with the biscuit would have been possible. Some of the comic business between Jack and Sarah was amusing – the 'rabbit' business particularly. But the pastry was made with almost no mess at all. This scene, for which washable clothing was needed, ought to have been gloriously slapstick with everyone covered in gunge. The 'tooth' scene promised well but was too cursory in performance and too much was masked. It ended well, but we only had the briefest glimpse of Sarah's bloomers and ridiculous physical business was limited. All the ingredients, such as invention, were there to make a huge success of these scenes but they remained insufficiently developed. This was also true of the shop scene though the farts introduced just the right note of vulgarity. It cannot be sufficiently stressed that pantomime is about low comedy, horseplay, pratfalls, tumbling, actions performed outrageously. These things are at the heart of the genre and were especially important with an audience which was failing to respond to the verbal jokes. The cast must have felt they were ploughing through mud so dull was this audience.

Production numbers were very well mounted creating detailed and attractive pictures. The Guildhall scene and the Sultan scene were lively, full of interest and colourful. The strobe lit scene in the shop was effective. The morning after scene didn't really work. There was a shortage of invention and Dick was unseen by a large part of the audience because he was placed on the floor. While you can do this where there is raked seating, it should be avoided in this hall.

The story sometimes became unclear, but perusal of the script convinces me that this was not the fault of the director. The plot seems poorly developed by the writer. The director had taken steps to see that the show ran smoothly and fluently.

EFFORT, ORIGINALITY AND ATTAINMENT

A great deal of effort was noted on the part of everyone in the team. The group needs to be a little more discriminating in their choice of script. There are scripts of much better quality that relate the story of Dick Whittington more dramatically and a lot more clearly.

Thank you for your most kind hospitality.