

Aladdin

A pantomime by David Wood
Performed in Jan/Feb 1990

Panto notable for cameo roles

Pantomimes: expensive, glitzy affairs with superb effects and a galaxy of television stars but not much atmosphere - or low-budget village hall shows with local characters making fools of themselves in front of friends and neighbours...

Faringdon's pantomimes have always managed to combine the camaraderie of the village show with the artistic qualities of the former, and last month's Aladdin was no exception. The cast had the audience booing, hissing, cheering and 'aaahing', and made good use of the access between stage and auditorium to get close to the audience, while enabling complex scene changes of incredible smoothness.

Helen Barter, in the title role, epitomised the principal boy and established an immediate rapport with the children; and her vocal performances were the best in the show. Peter Webster, the cadaverous Abanazar, threw himself (literally, at the end) into the wicked uncle role, and never once allowed us to feel sorry for him as often happens with pantomime villains.

It was always dangerous, knowing his capacity for rewriting the script every performance, to cast Mike Durham as Widow Twankey. However, all was well on the night and he even finished most of his many songs at the same time as the

This panto was notable for its tiny cameo roles - Tim Reeves, as Zadia's senile husband-to-be was superbly made-up complete with ear trumpet and Ho-Chi-Minh beard. I found later that his wrinkles took one-and-a-half-hours to put on - and half a minute to remove. Kevin Pratt had to wait a long time for his appearance as a sprightly Aladdin Junior, but we look forward to seeing him in bigger roles on future occasions. The guards - Alistair Warner and Debbie Lock - had little to say but plenty of bruises to collect in their knockabout partnership.

One felt at times that Cotswold Wildlife Park might have appeared in the credits - two monkeys, one camel and a baby dragon was my final tally. Camel costumes are particularly difficult to come by, but I did feel that a candlewick bedspread and a cushion might have been improved upon. Dragon (Richard King), whose costume was superb, and monkey (Melanie Stallard) in their different ways stole the show and probably ensured a crop of young hopefuls auditioning for similar parts next year.

If the show had one weakness it was the lack of one good, rousing, catchy singalong. Musicians Anita Thomas and Pat Metcalfe - both newcomers to Faringdon pantomimes - did an excellent job with the songs, some of which were reminiscent of pre-Beatles '60s tunes. The comedy numbers were

musicians, give or take a bar or two.

Nick Hobden and Lorraine France were splendid as the Genie family, uncle and nephew. Lorraine (the one with the light brown hair and midriff) had such a propensity for spoonerisms that it was fortunate for the family nature of the show that she didn't have too much dialogue with Widow Twankey.

Ieuan Thomas, as the Sultan, lent an air of dignity. Louise Collins, in her first major role, as Princess Zadia, was the ultimate adolescent and a crackshot with the pea shooter.

great fun.

The lighting and effects department deserves a special mention for managing without too many thunderflashes. In all, director Carolyn Taylor deserves the highest praise for once more motivating the cast and stage crew into providing Faringdon with an entertainment to be remembered for the rest of the year.

Dave Headey

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