

Faringdon Dramatic Society
Dick Whittington
5th February 2011-02-27 Faringdon Primary School
Gareth Jeremy – Region 12 (London)

Once again, my thanks to **Karen Whiffen**, your secretary, and on this occasion, your Show Director for the invitation to review your production.

This was a script by **Alan Frayn**, and was ideal for the Society, and I certainly enjoyed the banter between the audience, and some of the characters on stage. There was something for everyone, and certainly the Saturday evening audience had enjoyed the evening's entertainment. Everyone on stage had given 100% commitment, as I'm sure they had on every other performance.

Director **Karen** had put a lot of thought into the staging of this production - before and during rehearsals. Her daughter **Jenny (as a very young Choreographer)** had worked hard with her troupe, and the evidence was there for all of us to see. **Congratulations.**

There were ten **Principal Characters**, and a **Chorus of Ratlings, Native Guards, Sailors and General Chorus Members**, totalling **thirty-six** - considerably less than in *Aladdin*, last year – but nevertheless, the enthusiasm and vigour was just as powerful. The discipline showed by everyone was first-rate, they were confident in all that they did – and the majority **smiled**, which is a great help to everyone.

The show was in two Acts, having 7 Scenes in act 1 and 8 in Act 2. We went from **Olde London Town to Inside Fitzwarren's Store**, to the **Ship** and the Sultan's Palace – the set was well designed by **Jo Webster and Carole Tappenden**, two experienced members of the Society, and soundly constructed by **Peter Webster, Jeff Barry, Alan Merrick and Richard Lock** – the Society are fortunate that they can call on such a dedicated team of individuals to help out on a regular basis – long may it continue!

Lighting design – Ian Chandler, and Operators – Paul Mountford-Lister and Martin Whiffen did a first-rate job – I liked some of the pastel shades used. The **Sound Input of Gary Bates and Gordon Belcher** was very realistic – I liked the under the sea effect and the bubbles!

Costumes – Jeni Summerfield, Joan Lee and Sharon Gerry – these were excellent, colourful, clean, well-fitting, and I was very impressed with the **Cat's** outfit. And **King Rat** – again, you are fortunate to have such a talented team.

Make Up – Lyn Waugh, Nona Lewis, Katie Dyet, Karen Whiffen – again, very impressive, especially the Cat and King Rat.

As you all know, there are many "**Behind the Scenes**" people who are required to make any production tick and run smoothly – where would you be without:

Stage Manager – Ian Lee

Back Stage Crew – Peter Webster, Alan Merrick, Jeff Bates

Producer and Programmes – Dave Headey

Prompt – Katie Dyet, Mary Mountford-Lister

Props – Sandra Keen, Sarah Couzens

Rehearsal Pianist – Karen Vogt

Publicity – Fiona Merrick

Posters and Bar Manager – Adrian Wells

Front of House Co-Ordinator – Sarah Varnom

Front of House Staff – Vern and Lily Dunkley, Dave Headey, Denise Monk, Fiona and Keith Merrick, Mary Mountford-Lister, James Murphy, Sheila Rowan, Alan Taylor, Miriam Wells, Simon Wisbey

Thank you all for your contribution to the success of this production.

The evening started with the **Orchestra, under Musical Director/Vocal coach Marianne Raho**, giving us a selection of musical numbers such as “**The Sun has got his Hat on**”, “**Congratulations**”, “**Hello Dolly**”, to name just a few. The **six-piece Orchestra** was great, but I did feel at times they were a little too loud for some of the soloists. I would have preferred the **MD** to have stood in a different position, because some of the **Orchestra** had their back to her, and therefore it would have been difficult for them to see any particular instructions she wanted to give them. I know it was important for the **Soloists and other Singers** on stage to see her and follow the baton, but perhaps she could have stood more to the right, with her back to the wall? Having said that, they made a pleasant sound, and it made all the difference to the overall performance.

The Principals – as mentioned earlier, there were 10 Principal Characters, and they all supported each other very well – we had only a few prompts (and I think that was to make sure she was awake for the entire performance!!)

Abby Benson: Dick - Looked good on stage, stood upright, clear diction, sang with clarity in both solos and duets with **Alice** – and they blended well. Made good use of the stage, and was very relaxed in all that she did.

Michael Tipper: Dolly Dumpling – it is obvious that his “Business Seminars” had helped him a great deal. Considering this was his first time in amateur Dramatics, I think he did remarkably well, especially to play the part of a “Dame” - to me this is like being a clown in a circus – by that time they have reached the *pinnacle of perfection in their art*. You must have worked very hard, and been given some first class direction. You were at ease in all that you did, made good eye contact with your audience, good clear diction and made sensible use of the stage area – well done. Will this be the first of many performances?

Debbie Lock: King Rat – Another fine performance, by one of the most experienced performers in the Company – she showed the evil in **King Rat**, both vocally and facially, and had complete control of the **Ratlings**. Debbie excels at whatever character she plays. Excellent make-up, head gear and costume. Everybody loved to hate her, and she kept her character up throughout. Another strong performance.

Jenny Whiffen: Alice – Was the dutiful daughter to **Fitzwarren**, and did all that was asked of her. Both she and **Dick** blended well vocally, and in their dialogue – and they both seemed to enjoy playing their roles. She had a busy time, especially with all the **Choreography** she had devised, which was a treat.

Seb Allum: Jack – From his opening appearance, he had the audience in his grasp. He gave a very mature performance for one so young – his timing, diction and body language was so precise. I thought he was good last year, but the last twelve months have made him even more confident. When he and **Dolly** did their slapstick routine – this is something that can go so wrong – however, this was not the case, he took the lead, as a true professional. He is a born leader, as was shown in the song the audience were asked to sing – “**Turn Again Whittington**”. Congratulations.

Jo Garrard: Tom – With that excellent make-up and fantastic costume, you could do no wrong, but you still had to act the **Cat** – and you did a superb performance. Well done.

Gary Field: Alderman Fitzwarren – Did everything that was asked of him, and in my opinion, played it just right – wasn’t really in charge of his own destiny! Made good use of the stage, and his diction was clear.

Joan Lee and Lois Wells: Captain Cuttlefish and Scupper – I do not wish to separate these two characters, as they played off each other throughout the performance in a very efficient way. Looked the part on stage, and made full use of their comic role. I liked their boat, and the efficient way they rowed it – **Henley Regatta** next? Fine performances.

Carole Tappenden: Fairy Bowbells – Gave an unflustered performance, with clear diction, and in a beautiful costume. The waving of her magic wand made all the difference!!

Matthew Warner/Josh Ascroft: Sultan of Morocco – I think it was Matthew on Saturday evening. Looked good, spoke with a clear voice and did all that was asked of him. As did **Laurence Cain**, as **Assistant to King Rat**.

Director **Karen Whiffen** may have had some “sleepless nights”, but the end result most probably were worth it. She and her family have given a lot to the Society during the past fifteen years, and I’m sure the Society will miss their dedication and commitment to the group over those years. May I wish the family every success when they move to Lancashire in the summer, and may I also thank the Society for dedicating this production to the memory of **John Taylor, your long-standing Member, Chairman, Director, Actor, and every other possible role** – he would have been proud of you all, in what you achieved in your latest production.

Many thanks for the invitation – and I look forward to the next.

*Gareth Jeremy
Region 12 (London)*