

Delightfully down the rabbit hole

IT must be a measure of the respect, not just affection, in which members of Faringdon Dramatic Society are held by local people, that all but the very first night of their eight performances of the pantomime *Alice in Wonderland* were virtually sold out.

Given the the contrasting record of poor response to the efforts of professional touring theatre companies in the town and villages, audiences appear to be voting with their feet...And no wonder, given the talent and the quality of production that is consistently achieved by our home-grown version.

Fun though the audience undoubtedly found it, this was not just a seasonal romp with ill-learned lines and cobbled-together costumes. It was a class production, where the very youngest, smallest pussy cat at the back of the chorus was as well turned out and schooled as those who got all dolled up for the major knockabout parts.

The children were brilliant. But among the more seasoned performers, who will ever forget the mad, mad caricature of the Mad Hatter brought to us by Dominic Bullock? The wonder is that his daughter, a 13-year-old with a stagecraft mature way beyond her years, managed to maintain her wonderful performance as Alice without 'corpsing' at his antics.

The versatility of husband-and-wife team Jo and Peter Webster gave us, respectively, a crazily authoritarian Queen of Hearts and a splendidly goonish March Hare. Lucy Walden as the knavish tart-stealer and Joan Lee as Fish the footman made the most of their supporting roles, but one

would like to have seen Dave Headey given more opportunity to develop his 'dame' part as the Duchess — having been given virtually only one hilarious scene to whet our appetites. Rob Stredder, a seasoned entertainer but new to the Faringdon stage, even managed to show off his juggling skills between his otherwise rather laid-back portrayal of the henpecked King.

Carolyn Taylor's beautifully-observed Cheshire Cat character offered the opportunity for a Cats-style chorus (choreographed by one of the youngsters herself, Rebecca Lock). But in a

production dominated by anthropomorphic characters, every single one was outstanding, from Eaglet to White Rabbit; not forgetting Lois Wells' entertainingly Gaelic interpretation of the Mouse and Eleanor Morton's delightfully diminutive, numerically-challenged Dormouse.

Congratulations to joint directors Debbie Lock and Kathryn Whiffen, and to all who contributed to the *Wonderland* spectacle, especially sets and costumes. But most of all, thanks for that lasting memory of the Mad Hatter's Teaparty. I am still chuckling...
— I.S.



Lucy Walden (Knave of Hearts) and Dominic Bullock as the maddest of Mad Hatters