

The Pied Piper

A pantomime by Peter Webster
Performed in Jan/Feb 1998 at the Faringdon Community Theatre

Pied Piper leads Players in rat-tling good panto

THE rats certainly made their presence felt in Faringdon Dramatic Society's production of Peter Webster's fourth published panto script *The Pied Piper* - announced as its World Premiere.

Bewhiskered and black like a bunch of bully bovver boys in black leather jackets, they clawed and gnashed their way through a panto which was a little short on plot though long on characterisation and enthusiasm.

The story -based so loosely on Robert Browning's poem that it became completely detached at the end - concerned (of course) a town overrun by rats, with a set of competitors all trying to rat on each other in their bid to exterminate the vermin in exchange for some benefit to self: money, power - or (in the case of Roland, played by Christina Willett), the hand of the Mayor's daughter Lydia (Laura Thompson) in marriage.

The malevolent ratty crew was led by Chris Matic, as Ratsbane, whose thorough enjoyment of the role was evident, especially where he went off into little extemporisations that left some other members of the cast seeking their lost cues! Their names were lovely too - Ratafia (Debbie Lock), Ratatouille (Kate Lord) and Ratatat (Hannah Logan).

The fun wasn't rationed either, with plenty of comic characters to get the

It was disappointing that the production seemed to miss out on one golden opportunity for humour, though. One of the traditions of pantomime is to poke affectionate fun at local people and institutions, to include 'in- jokes' that people will enjoy because they are local, and it is a pity that the production managed only one local reference - and that to Swindon.

Tirn Reeves was excellent as the apparently upright Mayor whose integrity fell short of paying what he had promised to the enigmatic Pied Piper (Lee Thompson) whose benignity concealed a darker nature.

The hero, Roland (as opposed to the Piper as anti-hero) was not given a great deal of opportunity to develop the love interest with Lydia, but Christina Willett and Laura Thompson's duet was nicely sung and won a well-deserved round of applause.

Roland's scaredy-cat pet (who failed to live up to the name of Bruiser!) was played with charming feline insinuations by Naomi Bullock. Claire Green was the Herald, Karen Whiffen played Sir Arthur Mow and Lois Wells was Mystic Maggie.

The many youngsters who played rats, street traders, birds, young citizens and - yes, they crept in too - the Spice Girls, showed talent, energy and enjoyment that augurs

audience laughing. The knock-about duo Talk and Mutter (Jo Webster and Carole Tappenden) - a pair of Dad's Army-style pest control officers - had honed their double act to an hilarious and highly professional keenness.

Young Tom Woolman, as Nick Oursteeds, also exploited his 'wide-boy' role with a maturity and timing that many older performers might have envied.

The other comic element was inevitably the dame, Betty, played for all she was worth by Barry Willett in stylish wig, dazzling dresses and pinnies, and outrageous upswept glasses.

well for the future of the town's dramatic society. Their dances were choreographed by Debbie Lock and Carolyn Taylor.

Original music by Joanna Kenrick, and other songs, were played by Debra Warner at the piano, Alison Harte on keyboard and Jim Horton on drums.

The principals' costumes, made by Joan Lee, Jeni Summerfield and Sharon Gerry, the colourful set designed by Jo Webster, and the first class lighting at the Faringdon Community Theatre, all added to the high quality of the performance, which was produced and directed by Sarah Varnom.

I.S

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