

# Jack and the Beanstalk

**Society:** Staines Musical Theatre Group

**Production:** Jack and the Beanstalk by Alan P Frayn

**Director:** Lynne James

**Choreographer:** Annelly James

**Musical Director:** Guy Bunce

**Venue:** Chertsey Hall

**Date:** Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2024

This panto fizzed and buzzed along at a marvellous pace, and was a total delight from start to finish. What a way to get the younger generation to love the theatre – panto does it every time, oh yes it does! It helped too that we were seated not in rows, but at large round tables, with generous amounts of space in between. This meant that we adults could also enjoy watching the delighted faces of the kids at the other tables – a great joy to watch them having so much fun!

The scenery projected onto the backdrop was very attractive – first the village, then a windmill, the fair, the bakery, the castle, great to have so many changes. On and I must not forget the giant's humongous thumping feet in the castle scene! The beanstalk was very impressive, wide and tall, and would have looked quite daunting to the children watching, I would have thought. Props were fun – obviously Fairy Sugardust had a beautiful wand; at one stage there was a machine with a big switch to put the power on and off; there were kites; huge icecreams; large knives and forks, and various others.

Costumes were a delight, and well thought out. The wicked witch, Piccalilli, all in dark coloured 3-piece trouser suit wearing a steam punk look, top hat with goggles on, scary makeup, and seemed always to be under a mustard-coloured spot, obviously. In great contrast, Fairy Sugardust was in a beautiful pink sparkly gown, an impressive tiara, and always seemed to be under a pink spot. Jack, of course, as Principal Boy was in tunic and tights, with high black boots. Simple Simon wore a very jolly bright blue outfit with colourful striped shirt, and jaunty blue cap. Dame Dotty Dimple sported various colourful and outrageous dresses, tights, aprons, as every Dame should. Rancid, Piccalilli's henchman was clad in the same threatening style as her, with black long coat with brass buttons, topper with goggles. Scarper and Snatchit were in brightly coloured dungarees, shirts and caps. The King and Queen looked suitably regal, Princess Charlotte wore a stunning blue dress. Buttermilk, the beloved cow, was in black and white! The children had lovely dirndl type dresses with stripey skirts. At one point they became insects and flowers. A lot of thought had gone into this tremendous array of colourful costumes, and it certainly paid off.

Lighting was very impressive. Sound effects were great, scary thunder whenever the giant was moving about in his castle in the skies, his booming Fee Fi Fo Fum, in all its clever variations, might have given a few of us nightmares! The balance of sound between the recorded music and the singing of the cast was excellent, one could clearly hear all the words.

Director Lynne James had put together a great cast, full of talent. The production was slick, with great comic timing, super characterisation, many good jokes (along with loads of corny ones,

naturally), some fine rhymes and a good choice of musical numbers. There was never a dull moment.

The choreography by Annelly James was superb, first class. The children were fine dancers, seemed very relaxed, and had beaming smiles on their faces, the adults performed well too.

Nigel Martin played a super giant, though we never actually saw him, but we could imagine him with his booming voice – a good line in rhyme – and we did see his thumping great feet! Witch Piccalilli and her wicked helper Rancid were really mean and threatening, good turns by Lucy Curtis and Wesley Wooden, in his rather scary wig. Claire O'Neill was a sweet Fairy Sugardust, and very reassuring and comforting, a fine performance. Alice Macgowan acted the part of Jack well, and was very believable, as was Princess Charlotte, a part which seemed to be made for Fay Etson, who brought a lump to my throat with her wonderful rendition of Fields of Gold. Paul Bungard and Sharon Young were a good pair as King and Queen, him bumbly, her strong and competent. Three soloists, Jo Hayes, Debbi Raymond and Gail Thomas had fine voices, I would have liked to hear more from them. Buttermilk was the sweetest of cows, our thanks to Charlotte Benton and Sally Watts for her. Rob Franck was fabulous as Dame Dotty Dimple, ever more gorgeous. Dan Curtis as Simple Simon was not only extremely funny, with fine delivery of all his jokes, but he had a wonderful way with the children, not overpowering, but calming them whilst making us roar with laughter.

Altogether this was a great team, a marvellous cast, each and every one. I was told this was only SMTG's second panto – what took them so long? It was one of the best I have ever seen.

Congratulations to all involved for providing so much pre-Christmas joy!

Pauline Surrey

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