

2009 Bishop Burton Pantomime

It's that time of year again – pantomime time! On behalf the Bishop Burton Events Group, Mike Lund has scoured the doorways, ditches and bars of the village to scrape together a raggedy cast of local ne'er-do-wells. Even in the depths of a recession he manages to extract a stunning and wildly funny performance out of this bunch in his latest pantomime without paying them a penny. This year it's Jack and the Beanstalk. If you've forgotten the plot then you're not alone and it doesn't matter much.



From the start we knew it was going to be a good year as Trevor Thomas introduced us to the programme for the evening, impersonating Alistair Darling wearing a conjurer's fez impersonating an air hostess directing us to the exits in the event of an emergency.

2009 will be remembered as the year of the village's first hi-tech pantomime, jam-packed with devices, mechanicals, strobe lighting, noises off and "inventions" galore including some from "Uncle" (nudge nudge, wink wink, say no more) Englebert played by Gerry Brooks with due dignity and sobriety (at the beginning anyway). This was indeed a naughty pantomime for the last year of the noughties! Even the village web-site got a mention in this technology fun-fest but this will not prevent the author from providing readers with a truly objective account and honest appraisal of this year's pantomime produced by the talented, youthful and handsome Mike Lund, erstwhile dentist and friend of the famous including Dame Judi Dench before she was famous.

Karen Mosley was very persuasive as Jack's mother and played the role with great gusto and audience involvement. The children in the front rows on the Friday nights joined in enthusiastically and gave rise to some of the best ad libs of the night. Girl in a momentary pause in the proceedings calls out to Karen: "I know where you live". Quick as a flash Karen: "Is that a threat?"

Jack, the principal boy, was played by a very jolly Rodger Middleton. Straightaway he had the audience bellowing "Hello Jack, Ding Dong" in response to his greeting leerier even than Leslie Phillips and with better teeth. Rodger should though give more thought to his career and take care not to be typecast as a "nice but dim" teenager - although to be fair, it does have its compensations for us and for him.



Jack and his mother embraced enthusiastically at every possible occasion it seemed. Although their wigs (sorry if you thought that that was really Rodger's own hair) were vulnerable and Karen's fell off during their first embrace. (Didn't I see that wig on Rob last year? It's amazing how some things stick in your mind.)

Engelbert's invention of a high-tech semi-automated milking parlour was the source of much amusement. Nicknamed the Silver Cross, I'm sure there was a

baby Ellerington in that chassis last time I saw it on Garth End Road although the stool, bucket and carrot were missing. The device's eventual explosion almost brought the house down so loud was it. I'd always thought that Simon Cherry was such a quiet fellow – as sound director for the pantomime he's obviously found an outlet for his noisy talents.

Sue Brooks and Charlene Wright played Daisy the family cow bringing out its essential bovine qualities with great sensitivity but without much care for the stage scenery. Quite who was responsible for its deafening rear-end emissions that blew Jack's hat orff we may never know, but they probably registered at the climate change conference in Copenhagen.



The loss of the family fortune made it necessary to sell Daisy at market. How was it though that silly Jack was



persuaded to swap Daisy for 5 geriatrically (or whatever) modified beans developed by Professor Heinz over 57 years of research? Well, Graeme Pittaway's sharply-dressed but shady dealer – Mr "Big Mac" Burger - was the man of the hour with the gift of the gob (sorry, gab) who managed to trick Jack into the swap.

The beans were thrown away by Jack's mother in disgust. For me this was the low point of the pantomime. I was quite dismayed at the poor example of littering that this provided to the children in the audience. I hope that the team of script writers will re-consider this for the future. It would be much better next time if the beans were put into the brown bin.

Luckily, the beans grew into a beanstalk that reached the sky (audience: "oh no, it didn't" since there wasn't a hole in the roof). Jack Wray put in a chilling appearance as a council planning officer (aka himself) and entertained us with his objections to the unauthorised erection of an unsightly structure in the village.

Jack (Rodger not Jack Wray) then had an irresistible urge to climb the beanstalk – children: "go on then", "bet you can't climb it". But climb it he did. With the climb simulated by a clever strobe effect lighting we were persuaded (almost, anyway) that we were watching a skilful climb to the sky by mountaineer Jack. Mind you, he was well out of puff when he reached the top (really Rodger, you must get yourself fitter for next year!).



Pete Frewer was pure comic genius as the giant from the “petite” range of giants – he looked very like Don King impersonating a tight end for the Chicago Bears American football team. He soon had the audience booing (back rows) and cowering (front rows). His ‘orrible features must have kept many awake that night – me included.

Gina Douthwaite as the giant’s wife struggled to satisfy his gargantuan appetite but skilfully managed to undermine him despite repeated beatings. Cooking shepherds pie for the giant who ate people was one of her culinary highlights, although for the giant it was a bit light on shepherds – just two.

Emma Pittaway livened up the visual landscape as the deluded Fairy – deluded? well why else would she have thought Jack was “weally bwave”? Her magic meant that Jack was able to steal the giant’s hen that miraculously produced golden eggs which would restore the family’s finances. What a clever metaphor for the quantitative easing policies of the present government! Producing an egg that size can not have been quantitatively easy for such a small hen though.



The audience divided into two at the interval – grown ups rushed to the bar in a disorderly scum while the children formed an orderly queue to meet Santa ably and busily assisted by his elfin helpers, the effervescent Hilary Swann and the joyous Mariana Hankin (the youngest performer of the night – sorry Sue, you missed out again this year). David Oxtoby was supposed to be here at this point but I couldn’t

quite make him out – he may have been in disguise.



After the interval we were treated to the World Premiere of a song by the newest



kid band in the village (I kid you not) – The Peg Legs – with Sue and Trevor Thomas, Sue and Gerry Brooks, Simon Cherry and Mike Lund regaling us with their tear-jerking tales of damaged legs and other body parts. Miss Susan Leeding, the Musical Director, provided a sterling accompaniment to the merry songsters on the pianoforte, adjusting very skilfully to the singers’ variations in pitch and tempo.

The audience joined in too with the chorus of “Oh, No!” sung in the style of a hairdresser from Hull.



Now, back to the plot! Newly enriched and yet to suffer the taxes of outrageous fortune, Jack’s family are spending their money on home improvements ably advised by Lynn Middleton as a design consultant whose colour schemes are most exotic (and that was just her hair in Puddingate Purple or was it Oxtoby Orange?).

Slappaway Decorators are doing the work – colourfully represented by Richard Tomlinson and Rob Douthwaite, founder members of the Post Watershed Brotherhood – Dante Gabriel Rotisserie and John Milanese. Extravagantly dressed and coiffured, the camp decorators treated us to some good old-fashioned low-tech slapstick with paint and wallpaper paste.



Jack was again visited by the fairy who had been spying on the giant and found him counting out the money he’d stolen from the family. Jack dressed up as a hiker for reasons that escaped me in order to return to the giant’s castle. Jack: “How do I

look?” Child in audience: “Rubbish” – out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, Rodger...



The pantomime ended in the usual way with Jack demolishing the beanstalk with his large axe and trotting out the old one about his “big chopper” – a joke that you would have seen coming even if you’d been standing at the top of Butcher Hill.

The costumes were once again a triumph for Ann Cherry and her team of seamstresses especially the Slappaway decorators and Mother’s

many outfits.

Congratulations to all the cast and their many helpers on the night and behind the scenes. It’s been another theatrical treat for which we are all thankful. Can’t wait for next year...