

Alice Comes to Cumnor

The 2012 panto from the Cumnor Players was as polished as the village has come to expect. Based on *Alice in Wonderland* with a generous dose of matching 60s psychedelia, it was a mash up referencing more cultural icons than the average pub quiz. Music (provided by the Pantones) was mainly from the 60s and included classic tunes from the Beach Boys, the Beatles, the Monkees, Hendrix and Dylan.

The scenery and props were beautiful – handmade in a way that surpassed Kirstie – and cleverly picking up the psychedelic theme with twirly doodads operated by the Gagas (a trio of dancing back-up singers and lap candy for the Mad Hatter), giant tea bags and cups and pleasing multi-functional fireplaces that turned into teapot beds. Clever use was made of video and lighting to further enhance the rather trippy feel of the production. (Though that could just have been mulled wine on an empty stomach....)

Several cunning ideas helped get across the complex magic of the story. Three Alices were used – big (and male!), medium and small – to convey the shrinking and growing necessary to a girl with small doors to go through (see photo right). The Door became a panto sidekick. The Cook's baby was played by a balloon, enabling it to float distractingly away from its mother so that tart stealing could occur.

Traditional panto necessities were honoured – booing the Queen of Hearts, farcical chases, very fine bad jokes (thanks to the Door played by Anna Murphy), audience participation, and a truly marvellous double act consisting of the Knave of Hearts and Ten (Sarah Bridge and Amanda Gaydon) who were key to the tart conspiracy and tea-based crime about which the show revolved.

Even more clever (maybe too clever for a panto?) was the use of cultural snippets from the 60s – a recreation of Dylan's *Subterranean Homesick Blues* video, Manfred Mann's *Pretty Flamingo* as a throw-away musical accompaniment, the pastiche of the Sergeant Pepper album cover. If one knew the references one could nod knowingly. If not, You Tube and Google await for the education of



those left with a feeling that something had snuck by them.

Although much of the show referenced a century that younger audience members may have missed, there was genuine child hysteria in the rows just behind me when Dame Delia Dollops (with a nod to Spooner) was discussing the “treshly baked farts” and much giggling about the Two Ronnie-esque “Seven ate Nine” conversation. Card number Two (Emma-Rose Bouffler) executed a splendid stop/start shadow dance behind the Queen, showing fine comic timing and adding an essential silliness.

One of the highlights of the evening was Jo Coffey's Mad Hatter (Russell

Brand would be proud) who added a surprise element of rebellion – Tarts are for the people! – rather than the normal panto ending of weddings, and was perhaps the voice of the night singing *Hey Dude*. She was closely rivalled by Flossie Pottle's sweet voice as the Dormouse. The Children's Chorus were also excellent – 60s dancing at its best in miniature and fully enthusiastic form.

The range of talents represented across the whole production is very impressive for a village the size of Cumnor and I thoroughly recommend keeping an eye open for future events by a company with such high production values. Well done all!
Cindy Cave



Panto Photo Album

