

## **PARISH PLAYERS' ALADDIN - JANUARY 2012**

### **Review by Sue Edwards**

The displays of photographs and reviews and the welcoming front of house staff all contributed to a pleasurable sense of anticipation for the audience arriving at the Parish Hall for this year's pantomime.

As far as the whole visual aspect of the show goes, Neil Hellard and his team are to be congratulated on a first-class job. The design and execution of the set was outstanding and the stylised pattern in fresh colours framing the silhouettes, the cut-out trees, the lamps in front of the proscenium arch – everything looked both coherent and delightful, functioning effectively as a backdrop to the action. Scene changes were accomplished seamlessly, without distraction. Special mention to the creator of the dragon – elaborately worked and colourful, this was not just a nod to the setting but a real delight to both adults and children in the audience, as it wove its way around the hall. An excellent set of props, too, were just as they should be in panto – large and loud....

...Which brings me on to the band. I must admit to some trepidation at the sight of no fewer than 7 amplified musicians plus associated paraphernalia. BUT my misgivings were unfounded as the music enhanced the production in every way. The overture, an original composition, was an atmospheric piece evoking Old Peking – a very enjoyable start to the evening. The arrangements were sophisticated and used flute and percussion particularly effectively throughout the performance. The use of incidental links was sensitive, in fact the whole music side was really impressive; congratulations to the MD, Charlie Swift and his crew for a thoroughly professional job.

The cast saw a positive plethora of Parish Players' Old Lags in fine form. David Golder's Widow Twankey was arch and innocent by turn, connecting directly with the audience in the traditional manner. David's dame has a genial battiness and warmth that is very engaging.

Abanazer, ably played and sung by Roy Perryment, was suitably loathsome, and his eventual conversion to smarmy amiability via the secret weapon of Marmite was genuinely funny. Then there were Chris Abbott's Emperor, all dignity and respectability, generally raising the tone, and Angus Litster's Vizier, rather lowering it again but resplendent in beautiful headgear – also in fine voice in his song 'Prince Ali', a particularly strong opening to the second half. Special mention must go to Geoff Start as the Genie of the Lamp for greening up every night. His committed performance and his exquisite moves somehow reduced the audience to tears of laughter. A bravura rendition.

The last Old Lag was of course Pete Smith whose performance as Charlie Chan, the chief of police, was a gem. His careful Chinese comedy accent was well-sustained, well-articulated and very funny; his exasperation with his dense number-one son was all the better for being

rather dryly expressed and his timing was impeccable. Pete was capably supported by Joe Reeves, demonstrating his versatility as the second part of the comic duo, Chin-Chin Chan. Their performance, with friends, of 'A Policeman's Lot' was a high spot of the evening.

Katie Matsell gave us a confident and appealing Aladdin. One of the younger cast members, her energy and delivery were good – she was sparky and managed her interactions with the audience well. Katie Dixon played a feisty Princess Balraubadour, emphatically NOT a wimp - quite an achievement for a principal girl and very refreshing.

Anne Murray as Sing-Lo has great stage presence these days and gave us the reliable and charming performance we have come to expect. She was an excellent foil to Wishee Washee, played in a stand-out performance by Jack Pallister. He gives every impression he is having the best time when he is on stage and consequently, we do too. Clearly talented in so many ways, Jack is a born performer who lights up the stage. His short tap dance left us wanting more.

Amanda Roberts as the Slave of the Ring was lucky enough to escape the green body paint – her character was beautifully down to earth and the broad, all-purpose northern accent was fun. Amanda is another very skilled and experienced performer who is always eminently watchable.

The chorus was above-average tight, with moves that were realistic, varied and secure. Their costumes were good – 'Blame it on the Boogie' (so Chinese!) worked well and I enjoyed the ribbon-work later in the show, as well as 'Walk like an Egyptian'. They communicated enjoyment throughout and it takes a lot of hard work to get to that point. And finally, congratulations to the Panda, Chee-Kee played by Sam Litster whose moment miming fear in that great big furry costume was so impressive.

Technically, this was a very ambitious production. The lights and sound seemed flawless to me on the Friday performance, although I gather there were some glitches at other shows. The flying carpet sequence was excellent.

The pyrotechnics, however, are an issue you might like to think about for future productions – there were excessive amounts of smoke and some discomfort experienced by audience members around me. It might be better to avoid overkill. My only other minor criticism was the 7pt font in the programme which made it difficult to read.

To sum up: Aladdin 2011 was a thoroughly enjoyable show in the best tradition of amateur pantomime. Maggi Chick, the director, is to be congratulated on the way she harnessed all the talent at her disposal and came up with an evening that satisfied in every aspect of performance.