

*National Operatic & Dramatic
Association*

South West Amateur Theatre Magazine

"A First-rate Opportunity"

AUTUMN 2009

IAIN DOUGLAS reports on District 4 (Torbay)

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Jack and the Beanstalk	Totnes A. O. D. S.
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Carousel	Dawlish Amateur Operatic Society
Hello, Dolly!	Toads Stage Musical Company
Fame	MAD Kids
Oliver!	ToPs

ALADDIN (Morley), Teignmouth Players, Carlton Theatre, January 2009
Director: John Branch Choreographer: Laraine Lynch Musical Director: Nigel Crabtree

This is a company that really knows how a pantomime should look. The scenery was superb, and all the more so because this company produce their own sets in situ. The result is easily as good as anything that could be hired in, especially with the stunning Cave scene, which was a really good ending to Act 1. Similarly, the costumes were glittering and colourful. The visual effect was completed with excellent lighting as usual. Morley scripts, once the crème de la crème of panto scripts, are now rather outdated as the author is no longer around to up-date them, and they really do smack of the era in which they were written (the 1970's). This production was well cast, with some promising performances, and the company rendered musical numbers with as much verve as they could muster. I was glad to hear a generally more modern choice of music than last year, but what I felt was lacking, as last year, was the pacy linking up of scenes, and also the lack of musical cover for entrances and exits so that cast were often left high and dry and scenes started and ended rather limply, instead of with a bang.

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK, Newton Abbot Musical Comedy Society,
Alexandra Cinema, Jan 09
Director: Sara Roche Choreographer: Claire Robinson Musical Director: Andrew Downton

With Sara at the helm, it was clear this show was going to be energetic. I was not disappointed. The pace was very good indeed, and the musical numbers were taken at a really brisk pace, so the whole show had a lively feel to it. It had been directed with a good feel for the comedy which came across well, especially any scene involving Eddie Campaigne (Dame Hilda Trot) who was very amusing with his asides and quips. However the entire principal line up was well chosen with some really good performances all round including an entertaining fairy played in office PA style by Hollie Smith, a lovely principal girl (Amy Parnell), and the usual strong performances from Kate and Darren Parr as Ricky Trot and Fleshcreep. The cow was lively and comical, as all panto cows ought to be, and the

chorus and dancers contributed much to the proceedings. Claire Robinson, choreographing her first big shows for the society, really came up with the goods, producing some excellent and well drilled routines that looked good. This show went down a treat with the audience, who all had a ball the night I was there.

**JACK AND THE BEANSTALK, Totnes Amateur Operatic & Dramatic Society, Civic Hall, Jan
2009**

Musical Director: Jude Cummins

I have purposely not listed directors or choreographers as there were quite a few! This show had a bit of a rough ride in rehearsal so I was told, until the enforced departure of the director. Various society members then took over the mantle of production, and the end result was one of the better pantos I have seen here. The home written script was entertaining, and full of quirky humour. It was short (a big plus in its favour), and it hit all the right buttons. In fact the whole show had such an infectious enthusiasm and sense of fun that it was enormously enjoyable. The society was fielding its strong panto guns, who all gave their usual good performances, with some new faces thrown in, and the entire team worked really well. Some modern and lively song choices were very well sung, and the young chorus were well drilled and supported the show well. The 6 piece band were excellent and many a much bigger panto would have been pleased to have them in the pit. This was a good evening.

GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS, MAD Group, Village Hall, Malborough, January 2009

Director: Jackie Plyer Choreographer: Catharine Godden Musical Director: Jon Plimmer

Audiences can always be assured of a good pantomime from the MAD Group, and this year was no different. I was sorry to see that it was Jackie's last as Director as she has served the society well. I must confess to not being a great fan of the Long and Rawnsley Scripts, but the society adapted it well, and this script does have some nice gimmicks and twists to the usual story. Casting was good, with everyone playing to their strengths. No mean feat as the society doesn't have as many male members as it used to have. As in recent shows, Jenny Wood brought great energy and life to the stage as Barney, and other notable performances came from Jill Clarke (Baroness), Felicity Goodall (Mr. Dunn) and Lorraine Rossiter (Mr. Dusted). The well chosen company numbers were well drilled and the costumes and scenery were very good indeed. I always enjoy listening to Jon Plimmer's superb 6 piece band that would not be out of place in the biggest professional panto. Any criticisms? Please do try to have more musical sound effects to underpin the comedy and entrances and exits, and try to link the scenes with music to avoid awkward pauses.

DRACULA THE PANTO, Shaldon Theatre Company, Carlton Theatre, Teignmouth, January 2009

Director/Choreographer: Tracey Davies Musical Director: Daniel Saint

For their 25th Panto, the company chose another individual script, this time by Jim Sperinck. The result was a hugely entertaining show, well cast, and very well directed. As every director knows, half the job is in the casting, and this cast was first rate. Gary Abraham (Count Dracula) gave a really strong central performance and I loved Fairy Garlic (Nicola Samuel-Stevens). The brides of Dracula were hilarious, but for me, the show was stolen by Steve Collings who was excellent as Dame Rosie Glow, but given a run for his money by Sue Reed and Roger Matanle (Steak and Kidney). The 2 man band (Keyboard and percussion) gave good account of some really lively musical numbers, and the chorus and dancers provided a lively backing to the principals. Good musical cover for entrances and exits ensured there were no silent moments (always a no-no in panto). The audience response at the finale was tremendous

and the cast knew for certain they had pressed all the right buttons.

DICK WHITTINGTON, Brixham Operatic & Dramatic Society, Brixham Theatre, February 2009
Director: Jane Barnby Choreographer: Sarah Faulkner Musical Director: Carl Smith

Alan Frayn scripts are the best on the market. Since using them this company has never looked back. I am very familiar with this script having directed it myself 2 years ago. This production was well cast with some very attractive performances. Andy Killen (Dame) was entertaining and it was nice to see Graham Mewis again (Fitzwarren) after so many years. Jon Harrison (Idle Jack) shows much promise but needs to have more punch to his dialogue. Caroline Kendall (Fairy) and David Satchwell (King Rat) were a great foil for each other. There was a good choice of musical numbers and the band supported the company very well indeed. The audience participation sequence is always slightly individual here at Brixham, and this year two dads from the audience were hoisted on stage for a routine. Well, one dad, and a NODA Rep ! One thing I would love to see this company tackle now, is more movement for the chorus who came on to the same position virtually every time and were not stretched at all with the very simple choreography. Let's see more movement please ! Overall, entertaining as usual.

CAROUSEL, Kingsbridge Amateur Theatrical Society, Village Hall, Kingsbridge, March 2009
Director/Musical Director: Jamie Fraser Choreographer: Sonia Manning

I always love visiting KATS just to see how magnificent they can make their productions in this, albeit fairly large, village hall with its small stage. How wonderful it would be for them to have a larger venue in which to perform – maybe one day. This show is part of the staple amateur repertoire from Rodgers and Hammerstein. Dating from the days when audiences were more willing to sit for long periods of time, R&H shows tend to be very long for today's audiences and this one was presented uncut and as a result weighed in at almost 3hrs 10 minutes. No-one complained but there must have been some numb bums ! I did feel that some time cut have been cut if musical tempi had been brisker. However that is perhaps a slightly unfair comment because the music was given full measure with a superb 12 piece orchestra and very good vocal rendering from a strong cast. As usual imagination reigned supreme with the staging, which was very good indeed. There were no weak links at all (I would have been surprised if there had been) and I didn't notice the time marching on. As usual, this was another show worthy of a professional venue. What talent lies in the depths of the south hams!

ALICE, Newton Abbot Musical Comedy Society NEWTS, Alexandra Cinema, 2009
Director: Claire Shakesheave Choreographer: Claire Robinson Musical Director: John Amery

This show is ideal for junior groups. It has many roles, so lots of the members have an opportunity to try their hand at solo playing, and the story has a lovely surreal touch to it. This youth group is strong on talent (it always has been) and it is always clear from curtain up on any of their shows, that good training is given in the various disciplines, so it is a pleasure to watch. I always admire the two Claires (who are not much older than some of the kids) for what they achieve with this group. They work really hard with them, and have that knack of hitting the mark and getting results, and in return are loved to bits ! This production had pace, colour, great choreography, and some lovely performances especially from Laura Robinson (Alice) , Megan Evans (White Rabbit), Sarah Jenks (a very stropky queen), Matt Tucker (Mad Hatter), Lizzie Holden (a zany caterpillar) and The Parr Brothers (Tweedles Dee & Dum). As always , the ever present John Amery provided good musical support with his pit band and ensured the kids produced a great vocal sound.

SHOWSTOPPERS, Totnes Amateur Operatic & Dramatic Society, Civic Hall, May 2009

Staging & Choreography: Kerry Manley Musical Director: Jude Cummins

In place of the usual book musical, the society opted to stage a songs from the shows type production in order to give all members a good opportunity and to use all the lively and able younger members that the society has within its ranks. Another plus to this type of show is that it is cheap to present and useful if a group is running short on funds. There was a well chosen programme from mostly modern musicals, arranged so that each act had a really big ending. The show included bags of imaginative and well drilled choreography, was well costumed and very well supported by an excellent 4 piece pit band. Standout contributions came from the Nicky Whitby, Paul Robinson, Martin Poveda, Karen Duffield (with a stunning Defying Gravity) and an up and coming Alec Poveda (Electricity – Billy Elliot) who is clearly going to be a future talent to watch. The ever entertaining Jinx and Peter Mattinson provided good narration and links although I would have preferred them to be incorporated more into the show rather than as separate entities, and maybe some of the songs could have been left to speak for themselves.

THE GONDOLIERS, Torbay Gilbert & Sullivan Society, Little Theatre, Torquay, May 2009

Director/Choreographer: Jane Mackay Musical Director: Bob Carter

This company always play to their strengths. They recognise that they are short of large numbers of younger members, especially men, but refuse to let this detract from a production, and instead turn these into strengths. The production was presented with a great sense of fun and largely tongue in cheek, and as a result the audience were very entertained. This wasn't a traditional performance in the sense of costuming and presentation and was refreshing as a result. The orchestra were off stage as usual, and were excellent. The company sang with gusto and were very well drilled in the big numbers. One can always be sure of solid performances from Steve Salmon (Marco), Julie Robson (Gianetta) and Shona Treharne (Tessa) and Nigel Hickman (Duke of Plaza Toro) but they were well supported by the entire company without a weak link. I was especially taken with gorgeous new face Suzy Winspear (Fiametta) and it was nice to see Andrew Bell (Don Alhambra). It was a shame there were not more younger people in the audience as G&S offers so much, but the large house really enjoyed the show and gave the cast a good reception.

CAROUSEL, Dawlish Amateur Operatic Society, Shaftesbury Theatre, May 2009

Director: Marion Copsey Choreographer: Rachel Martin Musical Director: Neville Gibbings

Last year I stated that “*Hello, Dolly!*” was the best production I had seen by this group for some years. Well, they managed to better that production with this one. The team rightly recognised that this show is very long, and made certain cuts in the longer dance breaks. However what made the greatest difference to the running time was the incredible pace given to the production. The action and musical numbers raced along at a very fast rate ensuring a bright lively feel. One could argue that some dramatic tension was lost as a result, but to be honest it is more important to keep the show moving along. Youthful and attractive leads gave fine performances and the chorus and dancers and children were all well drilled and animated. Musical numbers were carefully staged to look impressive on the tiny stage at this venue. Musicians off stage provided good support for the singers. As always here, the scenery was well thought through and attractive, the costumes colourful, and the lighting complemented both. There were a few little hiccups in the second act on the last night, but nothing to spoil the overall effect which was immensely enjoyed by the audience.

HELLO, DOLLY!, Toads Stage Musical Company, Princess Theatre, Torquay, July 2009

Director: Iain Douglas Choreographer: Aubrey Budd Musical Director: John Amery

Lynne Caygill reports:-

In the 1960's Carol Channing made the title role of this show her own on Broadway and her style of singing with her low voice became associated with the part. Personally I prefer to hear the part sung at the written pitch, but the director of this show clearly took the Carol Channing sound as his inspiration. Despite my preferences this Dolly obviously enjoyed playing the role and gave a lot of energy to the performance. She was well supported by Vandergelder who played his part with the necessary authority. Irene Malloy was played with confidence and her performance of "Ribbons Down My Back" was one of the highlights of the show. Minnie Fey worked well with Irene Malloy, but there were times when her diction was poor and I had difficulty in hearing her. The ladies chorus danced well and looked attractive, but they needed to put far more energy into their singing. The men made more effort with their singing and made a good sound, but what happened to the harmonies in "It Takes a Woman" ? The end of this number is supposed to sound like a barbershop quartet, a little difficult when the only notes to be heard are the melody. The Waiter's Galop was a little disappointing. It lacked the necessary comedy due to the absence of the usual gags and sin of sins in my book, ladies were included. This company had enough capable men to perform this number as it should be done and I felt it was a shame they were not given the chance to do it. The orchestra played with a well balanced sound and was a delight to listen to. The highlights of the show were Cornelius and Barnaby. Their comic timing was excellent, diction was clear the singing of "It Only Takes a Moment" (Cornelius and Irene) was delightful.

FAME, MAD Kids, Village Hall, Malborough, August 2009

Director: Claire Tapper Choreographers: Claire Tapper, Gaby Clarke, Heather Johns & Sophie Hassall, Musical Director: Richard Carter

Jo Wilson-Hunt reports:-

As we all know 'Fame' was part of the 1980's teen culture; this production was an adaptation of the original film with all the hard-hitting bits removed but keeping the leg warmers. The large cast opened the show with gusto convincing the audience that they really were going to live forever. The characters were clearly introduced to us as they arrived to audition and the teaching staff made their presence felt. The principal cast showed maturity in their performances even though a number were extremely young. The two young women who portrayed Montgomery and Leroy need a special mention as they played young men with real hang ups and adolescent angst, and they portrayed the emotions and confusion of these characters in their own way without trying to hide their femininity and it worked beautifully. Musical numbers had been added to enhance this production and on the whole fitted the mood of the piece. This show had audience appeal and the production team had worked hard to present a fun piece of theatre and from the smiling faces of the audience they achieved their goal.

OLIVER!, ToPs (Torquay Operatic), Princess Theatre, Torquay, September 2009

Director: Maggie Campbell Choreographer: Aubrey Budd Musical Director: Robert Young

Companies presenting this show are at present benefiting from the tremendous publicity generated by the TV series staged to find a Nancy and Oliver for the London revival. This production played to huge houses in the 1400 seat theatre and ensured a wonderful (and enormously profitable) week for the company. Maggie is a Dickens lover and this was a labour of love for her ensuring that she kept as true to the original as she could within the sanitised script of the stage version. Those Lancashire accents for some of the characters was a point in question – totally correct and often overlooked. A well chosen

team of principals gave first rate performances and firm solid direction ensured the well known story came across with clarity. I especially liked Sykes, The Sowerberrys and Bumble and Corney and of course a superb Fagin. I mustn't forget the youngsters. As always they stole the show. Oliver and Dodger benefited from Maggie's firm direction and held their own beautifully. I was just sorry that the entire team of boys (and girls) couldn't stay for the final bow. The virtually full last night house would have raised the roof for them.

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Invoices will be sent in December.

Please pass to your Treasurer for immediate attention and save your volunteer Regional Representative a lot of extra work.