

PANTOMIME is often the first experience that children have of the theatre and, therefore, such shows must appeal to all age groups. The Wadhurst Dramatic Club has certainly to be warmly commended for managing that superbly, practically from the moment the lights went up on their performance of *Puss in Boots*, written by Ben Crocker, directed by Russ Kirton.

The relatively small stage in Wadhurst must have challenged the organisation of a cast of thirty ranging in age from 8 to.....a lot older, but the choreography by Anneke Bones was well-managed and the tableaux created were often eye-catching and beautiful, helped greatly by the stunning backdrops. The forest scenes were particularly delicate and evocative. Well done, Colin and Nance Hand.

This particular script leaves much to the director's initiative and Russ used his imagination to good effect. The selection of music ranged from Music Hall, through cockney songs to modern favourites and the projection of audience participation numbers on to a screen at the side of the stage was a master-stroke. Another imaginative ploy was to have Jack, elegantly played throughout by Carl Gamage, "swim" under a polythene "sea" the full length of the Hall and back again. Not only can he "swim" but Carl has a good clear musical voice as well. We found that out when he sang a duet with the charming Princess Esmerelda, played by Charlie Frampton, who also sings confidently and musically. The Club is lucky to have such talented young stars. They also have a good young actor in Joseph Trotter, the Royal Page, who spoke clearly and had a mature authority on stage. His handling of the children coming up to sing with the cast before the Finale was masterly, an enviable lesson in people skills and spontaneous humour. He should go far.

This was a well-cast show and the youngsters of the chorus moved and danced with confidence and focus, having been given an ambitiously wide variety of routines to master. They rose to the challenge. Everyone on stage played their roles convincingly keeping in character, not always necessarily the case in amateur productions. Many of the players had stock parts which did not allow them much scope for development; the "character" parts were well-presented. The two fairies, Catherine Whitehead the baddie, and Bebe Bayford the goodie were a nice contrast to each other, Grimgrab the Ogre (aka James Edwards) was enthusiastically boo-worthy, and Queen Wendy played by Jamie Crawford was magnificently exaggerated and over-dressed. I lost count of the number of costume changes 'she' had but each was more outrageous than the last. This was a rumbustious, energetic performance which delighted the young members of the audience. Tacita Alder was the Puss without Boots and she played it with a purrfect sense of feline timing whilst Janet Connell as Puss with Boots has a fine stage presence and consummate acting ability.

The pictures created on stage were lovely. All such success is possible only thanks to a very strong back-stage support team responsible for the lighting and sound, sets, props, costumes and make-up. Congratulations to every one of them.

Going to a Wadhurst production was a pleasurable experience because of the welcoming and inviting atmosphere, and for their colourful programmes. It adds to the excitement of anticipation to be able to see the cast photographs on the centrefold and to imagine what is to come.

All in all, this was an enjoyable production of a not particularly well-known story and the whole Company thoroughly deserved the rapturous applause at the end. As Jack says at the end: "My cup is full, right to the brim"!

Thank you all very much indeed.