

Tommy the cat is a hoot

Sanderstead Dramatic Club

Dick Whittington

Diana Eccleston

THIS WELL-LOVED tale has been scripted by company members David Apps and Gordon Drayson and the result is more than satisfactory.

There are plenty of groanworthy gags, lots of chances for audience participation, a successful haunted scene and a song-sheet.

The colourful sets (designed by Di Ralston and Pat Precious) are especially well-painted and cheerful and the transformation scene, in which Dick dreams he is being made Lord Mayor of London, is true panto-magic.

The only real difference to the traditional story is in the shape of Dick's cat Tommy and it is a master-stroke.

Far from being just a meowing moggy on all fours, John Tait plays him as a walking, talking character the kids just love.

Reminiscent of the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, Tommy is scared of rats and the only thing which will induce him to do battle with King Rat is to rescue the jam tarts which are his passion.

Gordon Drayson plays evil King Rat with great relish and merits the boos hailed upon him by the audience. Dalma Scott eggs on the goodies as a sparky and sparkling

Fairy Bow Bells, and with a suitably Cockney accent which would not be out of place in *EastEnders*.

John Shepherd is making his eighth consecutive appearance as dame. I last saw him in action as Connie Crusoe two years ago and described him as 'being as cosy, comfortable and unglamorous as a pair of well-worn slippers.' I can't improve upon that now: his Sarah the Cook ladles out just the same helpings of gentle comeds, with the same easy-going delivers, which makes the show go with a swing.

Perhaps, though, it's time for wardrobe to be persuaded to splash out on a make-over for Mr Shepherd's old ladies as Sarah's make-up is pretty, gruesome and her only wig a bit boring.

David Apps (co-writer, who also directs) doubles up as Alderman Fitzwarren and his cousin the Sultan of Morocco. Their quiet reserve must run in the family.

Tim Crump, Mick Wall and Catherine Yardley, play comic trio Captain Cuttle and his crew, who make the most of the haunted cabin sequence. The slapstick episode in the kitchen is less successful because the small amount of business hasn't been worked through.

Fiona Rae is a stylish Dick Whittington with fine singing voice, and Olivia Bradshaw is a lively Alice.

Jokes with a local flavour come courtesy of Sanderstead socialite Mrs Millett-Fillett, Glenys O'Sullivan. Creative use of the "babes" from the Hilton Dance Studios adds a great deal to the charm of this panto and they are delightful as ratlings, Young shoppers, animals, little sailors and bridesmaids.

There are some good songs and terrific atmospheric incidental music. It's hard to believe that all the sound comes from just one man in the pit: the talented Ian Rae.