

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

Sanderstead Dramatic Club

★★★★

THIS company has a long tradition of producing panto, a mainstay of their repertoire for the 99 years the club has been in existence.

It is not surprising then that they have got the recipe pretty much perfect when it comes to serving up what the local community wants.

Current thinking in the professional theatre world is that modern audiences are too sophisticated and cynical to accept girls playing principal boys.

Sanderstead Dramatic Club thinks otherwise and the legions of little Beavers, Brownies and Rainbows at the matinee I

went to seemed to have no trouble with the concept.

I've never seen the legend of the Pied Piper who rids the German town of Hamelin of rats turned into a pantomime before, but you can usually rely on this group to come up with something original.

David Apps and John Desbottes are responsible for the script and also bag themselves a couple of roles.

At the centre of the action is the ever-dependable John Shepherd, who plays Dame for the 14th consecutive year.

There's never any mistaking the fact that he's a bloke in a dress with lashings of eye shadow and huge false eyelashes.

Feminine he isn't, but he's totally at home with all the traditions of the role, tells the corny jokes with relish, is quick to ad-lib and immediately has the youngsters on side and yelling out whenever he comes on stage.

There's more comedy from ratcatchers Matt the dozy one (David Apps) and Nat the excitable one (Gordon Drayson).

Their haunted bedroom scene with huge spider descending from the ceiling, spooky portrait, clothes coming out of the wardrobe on their own and moving candlestick is one of the best.

The quartet of municipal baddies trying to rig the mayoral election are too tepid and could crank up their opportunities to be booted.

Give it some more oomph please Ian Watson (Mayor), John Desbottes (Town Clerk), Paul Barlow (Assistant Town Clerk) and Chris Reid (work experience.)

Emily Caldwell is the attractive Pied Piper and Helen Chandler is principal girl Heidi with a lovely singing voice. Penny Parks provides the chorus of dancers and cute rats.

The show includes plenty of hummable songs (I liked the original lyrics for some of the familiar melodies) and a good old song sheet.

Great stuff and I look forward to a 100th anniversary extravaganza next year.

Continues until tomorrow (Saturday).

Diana Eccleston