

Dick Whittington

Sanderstead DC

rating ★★★★★

Once again this company have turned out a hugely enjoyable, traditional panto.

Particular strengths are its beautiful sets, colourful costumes and original, witty script by John Desbottes, who also directs so gets exactly (we hope!) what he intended from the cast.

This is led as usual by John Shepherd, playing his umpteenth dame, Sarah the cook. I think the scenery could collapse and he would still sail through with his boisterous mixture of relaxed charm and armoury of ad-libs which make us in the audience feel so comfortable when he is up there on stage.

I like the way he gets everyone in the mood right from the start, initiating all the little panto novices into the curious world of hissing, booing and look-behind-you until their enthusiastic volume practically raises the roof.

Jo Emery is a leggy principal boy as Dick and has the delightful companionship Catherine Roberts' cuddly comical cat Tommy. This feline is a real personality and I like the twist that although he can talk, only the audience can understand what he is saying.

There is more comedy from nautical double act Captain Cockle (a smooth Adam Damerell) and his dopey Mate (Chris Reid) with Catherine Reid as Fairy Bow Bells and Tim Crump as the wicked King Rat delivering their rhyming couplets with style.

Hazel Istead and Helen Johnson are a couple of feisty females as Alice and Jill, disguising themselves as sailors to join the ship's crew and keep an eye on

their menfolk. And there is sterling service from Phil Damerell as Jack, Ian Watson as the Alderman (who would look more dignified in a pair of trousers!) and Jane Manns doubling as union official (don't ask!) and the Sultana of Morocco.

The Penny Parks dancers are creatively used and a highlight for me was the beautifully realised dream scene which ended the first half.

And none of this would have been possible without the support of Chris Greenhalgh and his musicians and a talented backstage team, so congratulations to one and all.

Diana Eccleston