

Jack and the Beanstalk

SANDERSTEAD DRAMATIC CLUB

Rating ★★★★★

NOW that many professionals have dispensed with girls playing principal boys it is down to companies such as Sanderstead Dramatic Club to keep up the old panto tradition.

This group always puts on a good family show. The title may change each year but the quality and good old-fashioned values remain constant.

I've lost count of the number of times I've seen John Shepherd as dame – most of his 17 times I suspect!

He's so dependable and funny, anything could go wrong (and sometimes did at the busy Saturday matinee I saw) and he'd keep right on producing the laughs. And was it my eyesight, or does Dame Trudy Trott look just a little more glam than her predecessors?

As last year, excellent Jo Emery is the principal boy, the heroic Jack who gets to climb the well-designed beanstalk, which is part of a colourful picture book set.

Shame, though, that we never get to see the giant, magic harp or golden egg-laying goose we hear about. Jack and the Beanstalk is my favourite panto as I love all the huge props you can have for the giant's castle scenes and John Desbottes' production didn't include any. Boo!

Ian Watson usually finds himself cast as an ineffectual goodie but this year he's promoted to baddie, the giant's henchman Gruesome. And he's found his niche. It's a great performance, all crouchy, growly and just scary enough for the little ones in the audience.

His adversary is Jill Fortune's Fairy Flora, with gardening fork for a wand. They make fine sparring partners with their well-written rhyming couplets.

Hazel Istead is once again the feisty princess and David Apps is the comical dairyman Simon. It's a confusing take on this panto's customary Simple Simon: instead of being all silly and slapstick he's slow and deadpan in a Harpo Marx bubble wig. More smiles and giggles would have helped the character.

The audience loved naughty Daisy the Cow (Catherine Reid and Sarah Smith) and there was some pretty dancing from the girls from the Penny Parks Musical Workshops.

*Until Saturday, January 17 at All Saints Church hall, Onslow Gardens.

Diana Eccleston