

Ali Baba

Performed by The Bunbury Players
Venue: Great Heath Academy, Mildenhall
Director: Darren Mather
Musical Director: Mark A J Checkley
Choreographer: Kimberley Pearson & team

It seems to be a growing trend to perform pantomimes in February half-term week which, judging from the almost full house with an audience made up of a great number of children, seems to have paid off for The Bunbury Players.

This year's choice of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves proved a popular one although there were never forty thieves at any one time as some of them were off on a Conflict Management course! Of course this meant all the thieves left in Baghdad were kept pretty busy by their evil boss Mustapha Lot.

Our storyteller, Scheherazade (**Flip Miller**) got things off to a good start. Giving no quarter to the fact we were all in Baghdad she narrated throughout in a broad Yorkshire accent which shouldn't have worked - but it did. This was a nice cameo role which Flip made her own.

Once the curtains opened on the old bazaar in Baghdad the cast hit the stage running with a fast and furious number which should have left them breathless - but didn't! I commend all the harem dancers, thieves, attendants, guards and the good people of Baghdad on some excellent support. The singing was good and the choreography was well executed. A few more smiles would have enhanced things though.

I particularly enjoyed the performance of **Alyssa Foster** who was excellent as the stropky technology loving Princess Jasmine; the vivacious **Carrie Parsons** who made a wonderful Genie of the Box and especially **Katie Beckett** who gave an effervescent performance as Hoo Wazee the Sultan's Wazir - I loved the way the temporary palace on the green became a running gag. **Alisha Scarrow-Woodhouse** as Salina the slave-girl did a fine job particularly working well in a trio with the Dame and Ali.

Being the front or back end of a camel is probably never a good thing to put on your CV: nevertheless it must be a really hard job and not as easy as it was made to look by **Joshua Sulman** and **Harrison Southgate** who, as Carmel the Camel, both added that bit extra by tap dancing - amongst other things. Well done

Mustapha Lot, played by **Bobby Mather**, got the requisite boos from the audience but I think he could have been even more evil to provide a greater contrast to when he was under the Genie's spell. His cowering henchmen El Bow and El Bent (**Debbie Owen** and **Angela Tully**) were suitably dopey and incompetent and well supported by **Ethan Garrett** as Ahmed, chief among thieves as they successfully managed to steal the Great Scimitar of State from the all powerful Sultan Vin Egar (**David Staines**).

Jack Cutting as Ali's mum Dame Barbara Baba did a great job. Dames are usually played by actors with many more years's experience than Jack has. It is the Dame's job to "work the audience" which is no easy task but I congratulate Jack on his excellent performance.

Lacey Kiefer shone as Ali Baba. A young lady with great stage presence, fine acting skills and an excellent voice. She was a joy to watch. There was great teamwork too between Ali and the Dame.

There were some good solo singers amongst the principals and the contribution from the chorus, an all important part of any pantomime, was splendid. Chorus work under Musical Director **Mark A J Checkley** and Choreographer **Kimberley Pearson**, and her team was of a very good standard with the music provided by some very talented musicians.

The venue this year was a new one for The Bunbury Players and working in a new venue always proves an added challenge, one which they met and embraced. The sound effects and lighting rig was good although I thought the sound levels were a bit high thus precluding us hearing all the words of some of the songs. **Mandy Morrish** and her costume team had done a first-rate job, the costumes were excellent and extremely colourful and the scenery and backcloths just right. I thought the oil jars were marvellous. Bravo whoever painted those.

Despite the pace dropping once or twice, all in all this was a very enjoyable production which had some nice added humorous touches by the Bunbury's enthusiastic Director **Darren Mather**. Pantomimes don't just happen, lots of work goes into them in all areas for months in advance until performance week when everyone else can appreciate the fruits of your labours. Well done Bunburys for providing us with a fun evening.

Julie Petrucci

Regional Representative, NODA East District Four South