

# Our NODA Panto review

written by Pauline Surrey

Jack and the Beanstalk needs no introduction, of course, but I was interested to read in the programme that the earliest known version appeared in 1734 under the title: The Story of Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Bean. This MAD Company version of the story was set in the Wild West, which gave the opportunity for some great numbers, costumes and props. The whole venue seemed transformed with various photo boards and some wild west type artifacts to put us in the mood. The well-designed, bright programme contained some good photos from past productions, the interesting note about the history of the story, some puzzles, plus the very useful list of past productions (always good to look back and remember past gems, I feel, and to note the passing of the years!)

Introducing everything, and looking after us very well throughout, we felt, was Fairy Beanpole (Olivia Tress) in her beautiful bright green tutu and elegant long green gloves.

The curtain rose to reveal the stunning backdrop of, to the right, Dolly's Dairy, a bright red building, with flowers hanging over the upper balustrade and from the windowsills. There was a large signpost showing the way to Dolly's: the cowfield; the desert; the magic well; the redwood and the barn. We met larger than life Dame Dolly Goldtop, played excellently by Mandy Coluccia, and her two hapless sons Billy (a fun performance from Jane Gleeson), and our hero Jack (Tatum Shields). The giant's henchman, Black Mac, appeared clad in Stetson, long boots, black mac, double holster, brandishing rather freely one of his pistols as he tried to get the due rent out of Dolly.

A very boo-worthy, suitably intimidating performance from Mick Selley. Then we were treated to a marvellously joyful rendering of 'Oh what a beautiful morning!' and 'Oklahoma'. The singing throughout the show was most impressive, a hearty chorus, great choice of songs, background accompaniment and voices well balanced, with perfect diction. The children's chorus too was a delight – we first met them in the song 'Hello, bonjour', which was absolutely charming.

A lot of thought had gone into the costumes, and not just for Dolly's amazingly large selection of gowns, nightwear, wigs and fine makeup, including at one stage an astonishing milk churn hat. The Sheriff, all in white from top to toe; rustic Billy Goldtop (who became Deputy Sheriff with huge gold star); Jack Goldtop, slightly less of a bumpkin, so we knew he was the hero; and Sheriff's daughter and Jack's bestie Jill, in a beautiful slim red dress with white cowboy boots. The children as mini-cowgirls and boys too. Daisy the Cow wore a cute straw hat with flowers and had amazing pink hooves.

Before Jack and Jill went to the market to sell Daisy, there was a need to capture the beloved family cow on camera, so we had a very fine version of 'What a picture, what a photograph!'. Daisy was reluctant to provide any milk for Dolly's cuppa, so we had some audience participation as we sang a jolly version of 'Daisy, Daisy, give us a pinta do', whereupon she did indeed produce a very large and very realistic cardboard carton of milk!

Failing to find a buyer for Daisy in the market, (she was a bit of a scrawny cow, lovely though she was), Jack and Jill walked on and found themselves in the desert. We had a backdrop of cacti, then with the most amazing large cacti props, complete with lethal looking spines and beautiful flowers emerging. So impressive! There was a totem pole too, and we realise we were in Native American country.

The MAD Company seems to have a Set and Props wizard in Hazel Simmons, who seems to go far beyond the normal call of duty. Astonishing, wonderful stuff!

The junior chorus did an intimidating war dance complete with hatchets, Jack and Jill were bound together and hauled before the fierce-looking Chief Dr Sleeping Bear, of the Have-a-Kip tribe, who proceeded to buy Daisy in exchange for the 5 magic (sparkly) beans. Those beans were planted one night by a group of young gnomes, clad in red, with spades, while Jack and Jill slept. The beans were carefully watered in.

Before the interval, there was a call for volunteers from the audience, before they and the full cast gave a rousing rendering of 'YMCA' – great audience members with fine moves!

There was a musical medley of all the tunes we had heard to introduce the

second half, where the sparkly beanstalk was climbed, and the giant's castle conquered. There we met the giant's kind and timid housekeeper, Jemima, a good performance from Autumn Ashton, who was too frightened to risk returning with Jack and Jill down the beanstalk. Once again, a marvellous set, with an oven containing chicken and pizza, a wall cupboard full of jars, and a huge container of MacDonald's chips, giant-sized, of course – such wonderfully amusing attention to detail.

What a transformation all that gold brought to Dolly's fortunes! Suddenly she was wealthy (in a wig full of dollars!). Everyone was decked out in their finery, in super saloon-girl type dresses for the ladies, as they sang 'We're in the money!'. There was a barbecue with a chef turning the chicken drumsticks, there were slot machines, a popcorn stall, a jukebox, and vast deliveries from Amazon or some such! She was splashing the cash indeed. chuckle.

The signpost now showed the way to the beauty parlour, the hot tub, the disco, the saloon bar, the bowling alley, the swimming pool and the tennis court! There was so much in the set to make us

The cash all gone, and Black Mac still threatening, another trip had to be made up to the castle. Threatening though Mac was, the Sheriff always bounded onto the stage to allay our fears. Claire Fewings was the most amazing bundle of energy, clad all in white, brandishing her pistol, charging about, yet with her eye always on the audience. This was a tour de force, super.

Dolly decided to follow Jack and Jill there, and she came across Chief Dr Sleeping Bear, (Harrison Coughlin), and they impressed us with a jolly version of 'Goodness gracious me'.

Of course, the second visit produced more gold, so Black Mac was paid off. Jack chopped the beanstalk down, whereupon the giant fell down the Magic Well, and as with all other objects that fell down that well, he shrank, and proved to be just Lanky Larry from the township. He was very sweetly played by Tony Robinson.

Jack (Tatum Shields) married Jill (Lucy Coluccia), and of course we were delighted, as this couple had found their way into our hearts, such impressive performances these. Indeed, all the characters were very real, and we became very fond of them all. (Even Black Mac!).

Writer, Director and Choreographer Vanessa Breach provided a fabulous evening of fun, much of it visual fun with those jokey sets, and it was full of great teamwork from her wonderful cast. BRILLIANT!