

## **ROBINSON CRUSOE and THE PIRATES by Paul Reakes**

Traditional family pantomime given a lively, fresh approach.

**The Mill Arts Centre, Banbury, Wed November 28th - Sat December 1st 2007**

Banbury Cross Players are celebrating Christmas already with a gorgeous, garish, and hilarious old-fashioned pantomime that whirled me back to my childhood and made me forget about the serious side of life for two hours last night. The smile is still on my face this morning.

It's all here: a cast of thirty-five, including the dysfunctional Crusoe family, with Nik Lester's Dame, Ma Crusoe, holding the night together brilliantly, dozens of pirates, including the excellent, dastardly, comic coupling of Dave Smith and Marilyn Fairbairn, a tribe of cannibals, an underwater scene starring an imposing but benevolent Neptune, a lovesick gorilla (yes, honestly!), and a suitably happy ending, with three concurrent, happy marriages. The large audience, 70% of which were under 16, were encouraged to participate from the start, and we all had a wonderful time, shouting, booing, warning the heroes of danger, singing along, catching the sweets that were regularly thrown at us, and eventually sighing happily when all the lovers were united. Even Ma Crusoe got her man, the gruff, masculine Captain Bowsprit: well, all the nice boys love a sailor, geddit?!

The costumes were magnificent, choreography of the many set-piece sing-alongs was inventive, the script was deliciously contemporary and specific to Banbury, and although the technical crew made some small blunders during a very busy and complex show, our enjoyment was never affected.

Don't go looking for political correctness, subtle characterisation, or a story with logic. Instead, let Katy Weston's handsome and brave Robinson befriend you and take you on an exciting, colourful, and action-packed journey that will leave you smiling and celebrating the peculiar and wonderful institution called traditional British pantomime. You'll love it! Oh, yes you will!

**Steve Woodward, 26/11/07**

**Daily Info. Oxford**

[www.dailyinfo.co.uk](http://www.dailyinfo.co.uk)

### ***'Robinson Crusoe and the Pirates'***

This week the Banbury Cross Players brought the pantomime season to north Oxfordshire with this highly ambitious production of 'Robinson Crusoe and the Pirates'. The amount of costumes, the classy sets, the clever props, the number of songs and the volume of sweets given away was truly impressive. The audience were taken from the safety of port, across (then under) the sea and finally washed up on a desert island complete with a gorilla, a tomb, nasty natives and good ol' Man Friday.

There were plenty of gags to grab the kids and lots of healthy humour for the adults. Songs were sung with gusto and feeling, complete with merry dancing and thigh-slapping silliness. We had soloists and the merry chorus. Lyrics were provided for the audience, with the little ones trying to see which side could belt out a better tune.

The cast to a man (or woman, it was difficult to tell!) were line perfect and able to improvise for laughs where necessary. Their characters were all the wonderful clichés that a panto audience loves: some nasty, some noble, some tiny, some large some weedy, some greedy. Sometimes they were happy, other times fed up.

Blackbeard was worthy of the hisses and boos, Ma Crusoe was dotty and delightful. Robinson was valiant and heroic in his quest for buried treasure, his brother Willy wonderfully ridiculous.

On a cold night the Banbury Cross Players gave us a truly entertaining and heart-warming pantomime. And as the adults took their kids home, little voices chorused their approval.

*Roland Lawrence (Trainee Journalist)*

## **Robinson Crusoe & the Pirates**

**by Paul Reakes**

### **Review from the Banbury Magazine - Dec 2007**

Allowing our request for information about local artists we received an invitation to attend The Banbury Cross Players annual pantomime. We asked around among our friends to see who might like to attend and submit a write up of it. As a result The Daynes family, well mum and the 2 kids, went along to The Mill to see the Saturday matinee performance of Robinson Crusoe.

#### **3 year old Ellie reports ..**

*The Mill was a really good place to see. Robinson Crusoe, the main character was obviously Robinson and 'he rest of the characters were his family and friends, his mum was really funny as she was a man dressed up as a woman*

*The show is very entertaining and I enjoyed it all the way through.*

*The best bit was when the gang went under the sea and there was King Neptune and his assistant and they had lots of fluorescent colours and they glow in the dark.*

*The character that my brother was scared of was Blackbeard the pirate played by Dave Smith. Thank you to the Banbury Cross Players!*

#### **Whilst mum, Sally reports ...**

The theatre was set up with all the props for the show. The seats were good because they were tiered really well which enabled everyone wherever they sat to have a clear view of the stage.

The lights dimmed and the cast started their performance with the appearance of the notorious Blackbeard who was appropriately scary and the audience booed and hissed at him. Then on came the dame who was Robinson Crusoe's ma. She had a big blue wig and her colour scheme and clothes sense left a little to be desired. She was a brilliant dame and had everyone laughing.

There were plenty of jokes throughout the play that were both aimed at the adult audience and the children. The story was about Robinson Crusoe being left a treasure map by his uncle and they had to travel to the desert island to find it, meeting various people along the way, including a really amusing Man Friday and Gorilla who took a shine to Ma Crusoe which was really funny.

There was a mystery pirate whose identity I will not give away but gave a good twist to the story. Just before half time there was a really effective under sea scene which had fish and sea creatures painted in neon colours which showed up superbly under the ultra violet lights and we met King Neptune and his subjects. Half time gave us plenty of time to grab a drink and some fantastic cakes were on offer.

Second half started and the rest of the story revealed. The songs throughout, all of which the children knew from various films, saw a lot of audience participation including sweets being thrown into the crowd.

There was also a competition for the best-dressed pirate from the audience and they all went on the stage to be judged by the musical director of the play and receive a prize. The scenery and way the play was presented matched any professional pantomime we have seen. Well worth a visit and the Mill Arts Centre is a lovely place to see it.

I had a look at the Banbury Cross Players website to find out more and according to their blog found out that the Panto proved a roaring success with near full houses and more mini-pirates than Banbury has seen since Canal Day.

Rumour has it, local MP Tony Baldry enjoyed the Friday performance - maybe all the booing and hissing put him in mind of Parliament?

Banbury Cross Players (BCP) were formed as an amateur theatre society in 1945 and have maintained a high standard of amateur theatre for over sixty years.

The Banbury Cross Players recently performed a charity performance at the Cheshire Home in Banbury, whom, coincidentally; we will be carrying a feature on this new facility in our next issue.