

Mr Theobalds presents

PUSS IN BOOTS

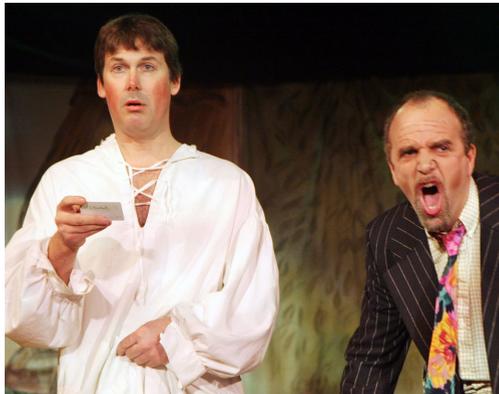
Those who were astute enough to snap up tickets for the Heathcote Players' pantomime were treated to a fast moving musical extravaganza with ingredients Fleet Street would die for: the kidnapping of a royal princess, a talking cat, dirty work at the cross roads (or at least on Shawford Down), body snatching, abuse of power in high places and even a striptease.

To a clever script by Simon Theobalds and music composed by Martin Harris and ably performed by him, Tony Hopkins, John Dickinson and Ed Gorrod (who since the last pantomime had bought a shirt), a talented cast of old hands, some newcomers and some very young supporting actors and actresses romped through the story of Puss in Boots like you never saw it before.

"Life is good when you're up on Shawford Down" they sang lustily and it seemed even better at the Bridge public house, presided over with buxom, bucolic bonhomie by its landlady (Sarah



Hawkins), who, freed of her erstwhile duties as director, blossomed as an accomplished actress and singer, well supported by Cookie (Jenny Walmsley), with Aleman (Marcus Whitfield) representing their customers.



But all was not going well in Shawford. The miller had died unexpectedly ('they do say they done him in'), leaving his youngest son Jack a woebegone

young man who is easily cheated of his inheritance and even his belt (a GREEN BELT you understand) by the threatening Mr Suit from OGRE, the Office of the Grandee for the Regions and Environment. Suit was played with suitable menace by James Marshall.

Jack is left with only the clothes he stands up in (the beltless trousers being more of an anxiety and let-down than an asset) and a cat. Nick Wells brought a naïve, bashful and vulnerable innocence to the part of Jack, a young man much in need of support and help.



His plight seemed to get worse when the cat relieves him also of his boots. But this is no ordinary mog. This Machiavelian, scheming feline was played to perfection by Ella Salkeld who, magnificently svelte and slinky in a black creation topped by a large red-plumed hat, easily outwitted the powers of darkness, bringing to the part a great gift of persuasion (*"these boots were made for talking"* she sang in a lovely voice). The powers of darkness were superbly represented not only by Mr Suit but also by his henchmen Bark (Bryan Green) and Hyde (Felicity Pennycook);



the former an old hand whose deadpan acting is always a delight to watch, the latter a welcome and talented newcomer to the Heathcote Players. This shady, sinister and sepulchral pair did their best to further OGRE's plans to create the largest car park in Europe in our villages.

The unexpected arrival at the Bridge of the Royal family, attracted by the game pie (the game supplied by none other than Puss) offers Bark and Hyde the





opportunity to kidnap the glamorous princess, beautifully (in every sense of the word) played by Pippa Wells whilst her father, the bumbling and bibulous king (Anthony Fanshawe) stands a round to the locals and his Queen (Sheila Forbes) frets that her daughter is missing.

The resourceful Puss turns all threats to his master to Jack's advantage so that at the end Jack becomes the Marquis of Attwood de Rove (no loans or payment involved) and also wins the hand of the lovely princess, she having been re-



leased from her bondage on Shawford Down by small animals gnawing through the ropes, again, all at the behest of Puss. The average age of the animals and dog walkers was very low but they squeaked and scuttled through their parts like seasoned actors, adding greatly to the fun of the evening.

For anyone slow to pick up on the underlying local politics of the script, a pair of peers in the Royal Box provided a slow lane. These aged and crumbly nobles were played to perfection by Simon Theobalds and Jon Hawkins, and quickened their pace in a barnstorming song towards the end.

This production was a delight with strong acting, good singing and music, and a clever set beautifully painted by Jon and Liz Boundy and constructed by Jon Hawkins and Duncan Potts, with lighting and special effects from Kevin Hughes assisted by his talented family.



On top of all that, the cast knew their lines....

None of this would have been possible without a skilled director and no greater tribute could be paid to Eileen Gorrod than to say that this was one of the most enjoyable pantomimes I can remember.



So to all our neighbours in front of the footlights or backstage, I say on behalf of all of us in the audience:

“Thank you: JOLLY GOOD SHOW.”

Phil Space