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## Treasure Island - “Banks for the Memory!”

The Shawford pantomime again provided a splendid evening of high energy fun, music, colour and great good humour – the perfect antidote to the post-Christmas blues. Simon Theobalds has surpassed himself. His inventive and irreverent script is full of wit, wordplay, jokes, puns; you name it, it’s in there somewhere. Even the cast list makes an amusing read. Although his principal targets are banks and bankers, he encompasses a wide range of topical issues ranging from the Osborne effect to both kinds of ashes: cricketing and volcanic. Not to mention the expected and much enjoyed local in-jokes (what would we do without the Otterbourne Road?). He even manages to include a pastiche of the Python ‘dead parrot’ sketch.

All this was hugely embellished by Martin Harris’s lively tunes and very clever lyrics (you have to read them to realise how clever they really are.)

This concoction was skilfully moulded by director Eileen Gorrod in to a lively, fast moving production, which cleverly surmounted the limited staging



facilities of the Parish Hall.

Inevitably any production bearing the title of Treasure Island stands or falls by its Long John Silver, and Marcus Whitfield does not disappoint.

His interpretation of the role, which

owes more, in its skilful comic timing, to Eric Morecombe than Robert Newton, was a joy. For me the high spot of the whole evening was his masterly presentation of Silver’s main song, for the way in which he ‘worked’ the audience, and brought out every joke in Martin Harris’s brilliant (I use the word advisedly) lyric. He was ably supported in his ill-doings by James Marshall, who is well versed in pantomime villainy, as Israel Hands. Together they extracted every possible bit of word play from Israel’s surname. Israel in his turn was assisted in his skulduggery by his gang of Nat West (Mary Amos), Abbie National (Lucy Green) and Lloyd Tisbee (Charlie Hurst).

Pantomime must involve its share of cross dressing, but Blind Pew and Ben Gunn played by women – “You cannot be serious!”? Never fear, two old hands were on hand to lend a hand (it’s catching). Felicity Pennycook is excellent and practised at doing ‘sinister’ and she was wholly convincing as a menacing Blind Pew, as always delivering her lines with great clarity. Sheila Forbes is equally good at ‘fey’, and you can’t get much ‘feyer’ than poor Ben Gunn. Sheila sustained the part splendidly, and she and Jim Hawkins played very well together.

The success of a production such as this depends upon the experience of its



stalwarts, who are relaxed and confident on the stage, and give the impression that they are thoroughly enjoying themselves. Qualities exemplified by the company’s resident innkeeper (Sarah Hawkins) and cook (Jenny Walmsley). Sarah presented Jim Hawkins’ mother as a

much livelier and more worldly character than Stevenson’s rather limp original. Jenny was Saucy Nancy, the purveyor of nauseous, nautical nosh, which, despite (or perhaps because of?) her persuasive sales talk, still sounded revolting. Emily Gaul was another who looked completely at ease on stage and who sustained the important part of ‘Jim lad’ in a charming and unaffected manner.

Every expedition must have its leaders, but none deserves such a couple of buffoons at the helm as the Squire Trelawny and Dr Livesey skilfully brought to life by Nick Wells and Brian Green. Nick’s Trelawny was all ineffectual, aristocratic pomposity, with half an eye on possible profits, but more often casting both roving eyes in the direction of Mistress Hawkins. Brian’s Livesey was equally self-satisfied, and secure in the position afforded by his medical status, the inadequacy of which was revealed, when it took the surreal sight of Blind Pew at the helm of the good ship “Northern Rock”, to sow even the smallest doubt in his mind that Blind Pew perhaps did not deserve his title.

The occasion was, of course, graced by the presence of our local dignitaries,



Lord Brackenlea (John Amos) and the Count of Malms (Simon Theobalds), who were keen to abandon their customary, crusty ‘what do you think of it so far?’ mode, for a slice of the action. After a tantalising striptease, they emerged transmogrified as a couple of Bermuda-shortened (not forgetting the suspenders!), geriatric boppers, to end the

first act with a rousing rock number. “We’re polishing our sunglasses and cashing in our bus passes. We’re set to sail away.”

Another pantomime regular, Anthony Fanshawe, like his namesake Goodwin Sands, made a brief appearance, but long enough to deliver the loudest, stentorian ‘Arrghh!’ of the whole evening.

Robert Louis Stevenson originally devised ‘Treasure Island’ for his young stepson, Lloyd, who, it is said, demanded a story about pirates because there would be no girls in it. What would Lloyd have made of this production, with its bevy of attractive Shawford young ladies? I hope he would have had the good sense and sensibility to enjoy it. A special mention must be made of Izzie Hanson who bravely opened the whole proceedings with a well-delivered solo song. She later joined her fellow Lehman Sisters (Anna Hawkins and Antonia Ashton Key), who proved they were a much better girl band than their brothers were banned financiers. “Thanks to their incompetence we’re all at sea and strapped for cash”, they sang.

Silver’s downfall was brought about by his daughter, Sterling, well played by Amelia Wrigley, who refused to provide the voice for his parrot, when she joined the ‘goodies’ to pursue her affection for Nancy’s boy (Georgie Howells). The pirate crew was completed by a feisty Goldman Sachs (Katie Hurst) and the apprentice pirates (Grace Perrott and Dominic Pennycook). All the young actors joined in with great enthusiasm, and were very much part of the action, providing a lively colourful chorus and backing for the songs.

Being asked to write these reviews from time to time provides a timely reminder of the wealth of talent there is in this community. This is clearly exemplified by the skill and professionalism of the band, Martin Harris (or was it Bob Marley?), Terry Hopkins (guitar), Emma Wells (keyboard), and



Gordon Munro (drums), who worked tirelessly throughout the evening to provide unfailingly reliable backing for their colleagues on stage, and to keep the show moving at a brisk pace.

Veteran Shawford player, and ever reliable prompter, Toni Bergstrom was called into action on one or two occasions during the opening night. But the experienced performers had the confidence to use the occasional ‘fluffed’ line to make a joke of it or incorporate into the action.

The production and management of the scenery, including the painting of the fine, brand new inn sign for The

Admiral Bean Below and the provision of the realistic ship’s wheel, was in the capable hands (here we go again) of David Woodward, Mark Hegan, & Rachel Hunt. I understand the company were indebted to Ed Gorrod for the initiative and skill he showed in imposing some order and discipline on the management of back stage affairs. Technological support was provided by Kevin Hughes, who conjured up sound and lighting effects and even a convincing tropical storm when required.

Andrea Green efficiently managed booking arrangements with unflinching courtesy and charm. The much-enjoyed interval drinks and mince pies were prepared by Pam & Jemima Theobalds, Susie Hill and Penny Hegan.

The first-night audience was excellent in that they quickly entered into the light hearted mood of the occasion, responded quickly to the jokes, readily sang when asked and gave all the appropriate pantomime responses (Oh no they didn’t!). Clearly this gave support and confidence to the players and we all enjoyed an excellent community occasion, which enabled us to set aside for a couple of hours the gloomy portents for 2011. Let us hope that they prove to be as illusory as this Treasure Island.

BOB EMMERSON

*[More photos on page 24]*



## Treasure Island Photos



Top: at the Admiral Bean Below  
Bottom: the Minstrels  
Left: One of the “Lehman Sisters”

