



Society : Riverside Players  
Production : **PUSS IN BOOTS**  
Date : Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013  
Venue : The Memorial Hall, Old Windsor  
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

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## Report

I was pleased to be invited to Riverside Players' 2013 pantomime "*Puss in Boots*". I watched the first evening of the second week, playing to a near packed audience. This show was produced at the normal high quality that I have come to expect from this talented group and I particularly enjoyed the projected images.

A number of the cast were affected by an unfortunate cold, resulting in difficulty of speaking and singing. However, with some effective miming and technical assistance, the show did carry on with everyone producing an enjoyable seasonal entertainment.

### **Fairy Feline (AMIE MACURA)**

What a shame that Amie had lost her voice, although remarkably, she continued her performance with the aid of a hidden microphone. It is a huge compliment to Amie and the technical crew that I managed to hear every word. Her character was superb – offering the typical "good" fairy, with lovely expressive facial expressions. Congratulations.

### **Puss the Cat (SUSAN BALL)**

This production used two cats, one before the magic spell was applied and one after. SUSAN's character was the more feline version, as she had no words and spending most of her time crawling around the stage, meowing; which she accomplished very well indeed.

### **Demon Voltaire (GERARD GAUGHAN)**

I have not seen GERARD on stage before, and was impressed with his interpretation of the pantomime villain, with an evil laugh and good mannerisms. He has a pleasant singing voice and maintained his evil character throughout.

### **Majorette Domo (KRYSTLE THOMSON)**

Another new face to the Riverside Players stage and I was enjoyed the role of the majorette, keeping the royal party in check. She played the part with great sincerity, good movement and fine characterisation. Well done!

### **King (ALAN PAYN)**

Alan gave a subtle performance as the rather clueless King. He produced a lovely characterisation with some excellent facial expressions, adding to the humour. In one scene,

his wig decided to go awry but managed to keep in character perfectly, unlike his fellow actors sharing the scene who immediately “corpsed”. I enjoyed the lisp that you added to the character, which, if overplayed could have been a distraction, however, this was intelligently used to excellent affect.

**Queen (JENNY BENNETT)**

This was a nice characterisation by JENNY as the Queen. She had good clear diction and heard every single word.

**Princess Pearl (SIAN CRUCEFIX)**

SIAN portrayed her character with teenage attitude, with several stomps off stage! It fitted perfectly and was performed with excellent definition. It meant that when she met her love, we could see the transition perfectly. You do need to be careful with your lines as a couple of times they were delivered a little too quickly but on the whole this was another fine performance from another newcomer.

**Hyacinth (CHLOE PICTON)**

**Petunia (SUSAN PICKLES)**

**Rose (JILL DADY)**

The three sisters were very well cast, producing a variation of characters. It is always encouraging to see new faces on stage and I was particularly impressed with CHLOE’s fine performance as Hyacinth and her lovely facial expressions. She sang exceptionally well, with confidence. Unfortunately owing to her cold that clearly affected her voice, SUSAN was unable to sing, but did exceptionally well to mime her song (being sung off stage). But her illness certainly did not affect her first-rate performance as Petunia.

**Harry (RICHARD WALLEY)**

**Dick (ALEX TAGGART)**

It has been good to see ALEX taking a different role and working alongside the experienced RICHARD, they delivered a very funny comic duo. Their comic timing was spot on and interaction with the audience was well timed. A good understanding clearly existed between the pair. A special mention to Dick for “not butter” speech the received a well deserved round of applause.

**Dame Doris Dolittle (JOHN AHERN)**

The Dame character needs to engage with the audience and keep the pantomime moving along. John produced a fine performance with good rapport with the audience.

### **Oddjob (JOHN WESSON)**

I loved the idea of this character popping up in each scene with a new vacation. JOHN played the multi job part very well. Playing the buttons type character, JOHN kept the pace moving and had a good rapport with the audience.

### **Ugly Betty (KRYSTINA HOUGHTON)**

This was another new face to the Riverside stage and another first class performance. KRYSTINA modelled her role on the TV programme “Ugly Betty”, in both looks and character, it certainly worked. She has immense confidence on stage, with faultless intonation and movement, but what impressed me most, was her face, with excellent, well delivered expressions. Her costume, pink cardigan and glasses clearly helped, but her overall performance was very impressive.

### **Tom (SAMANTHA SOMERVILLE)**

When SAMANTHA first came on stage with her arm in a sling, I really thought it was part of the act and was waiting for some wise crack – however, she had to perform the entire run with her injury. But such was the superb performance that I did not notice the obvious limitations this gave her movement, as she produced a first class performance as the principal boy. Her singing voice has come on very well over the years I have been watching and this was her best performance to date. Well done!

### **Puss in Boots (VICKI ARNOLD)**

With a wonderful, dramatic first appearance, VICKI was in command of her role as Puss in Boots. She dominated the scenes, perfectly capturing the character.

### **Estate Agent (VINCENT MENDY)**

### **Solicitor (THOMAS STANFORD)**

### **Gamekeeper (MATTHEW SUARES-WHALEY)**

It is always good to see young people on stage, and all three performed their lines well. I heard everything they said, which is a compliment as so many people tend to rush their lines or mumble so that they are not audible. But these three youngsters spoke with clarity. They also looked liked they enjoyed themselves and this always comes across to the audience who cannot fail to enjoy it too! Well done!

### **Gormless (ROMAN LACH)**

What a lovely part to play, and Roman certainly enjoyed the role of Demon Voltaire’s henchman. His movement and mannerisms were well defined and added to the character.

### **CHORUS**

The chorus were well disciplined, knowing their entrances and exits and attacked each of their scenes with energy and enthusiasm. Dances looked very well rehearsed.

**Director (SIMON ARNOLD)**

Congratulations to Simon for a superb pantomime. It was very well cast, with all the main roles being clearly defined. Movement around the stage was very well directed, with purpose and there was never an occasion of main characters being blocked – which is quite a feat on this small stage.

**Musical Director (VICKI ARNOLD)**

There were some new faces on stage and everyone sung exceptionally well – probably the best I have heard at this society – which is a compliment to the cast and the musical direction. There was excellent choice of songs, mixture of old and new, but all performed with energy and enthusiasm.

**Choreographer (VICKI ARNOLD)**

This must have been a busy show for Vicki, as well as playing the title character, she also directed the music as well as choreographed the dances. The dances in this show were effective, with everyone knowing what they were doing. *One way or another* routine was particularly effective.

**Stage management (SIMON ARNOLD) & crew**

Another very well managed stage with quick scene changes and all effects on cue with no obvious hiccoughs on the night I watched.

**Set**

The show started with the red tabs in, and effectively painted with footprints, both cat and human around the proscenium arch.

When the tabs opened, the sets looked very well constructed, painted with good perspectives. The addition of the projection enhanced the scenes.

**Lighting (ROGER LEWISTON) &  
Sound (MARK HASTINGS)**

Wonderful magical use of a projected moving image of Fairy Feline started the show. This was extremely effective and I liked the transition from image to the “live” version. Lighting effects, like the use of the red light on baddie and follow spots were expertly set and handled. The use of projection, for example a moving windmill and fireworks, added interest to the scenes and were extremely effective. I have seen the use of projection at many amateur theatres but none used as skilfully or as effective as this group.

### **Costumes**

Once again the players produced a good selection of interesting costumes for the cast that looked original and appropriate to the scenes – for example, the rather apt floral skirts worn by the chorus villagers.

### **Properties**

All the props were suitable to the production.

### **Makeup**

The makeup was very well applied as I saw all the faces under the lights. The application to the dame was very good and the red and black for the demon was especially effective.

### **Front of house**

I do enjoy visiting Riverside Players – a drama society that is friendly the moment you walk through the door. My wife and I were made to feel very welcome by Jonathan who ensured we had a programme, drink and seats. Afterwards, it was lovely to speak to the cast and crew, who all clearly enjoyed the evening as much as I did.

### **Programme**

The eight page programme supplied all the information one needed. Good, clear cast photographs that were complimented with a list of scenes and songs. The font was clear and easy to read.

This was my first pantomime of the season and I thoroughly enjoyed my evening. I look forward to watching the productions in 2014.



**Gordon Bird**  
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