

### Classic Christmas tale given fresh twist

One of the most famous and beloved Christmas stories *The Nutcracker* will be given an extra-special magic touch by Story Pocket Theatre at the Farnham Maltings this week.

With twice-daily performances from today to Saturday (December 20 to 22) aimed at children aged three-plus and their families, the award-winning theatre company will bring the tale to life with puppetry, original songs and magical dancing to bring out the imagination and make-believe of all the family.

When Clara is given a wooden nutcracker in the shape of a handsome Prince, little does she know she and her brother Fritz are about to be drawn into a great adventure.

The Mouse Queen has stolen the magic of the Christmas Tree star and the Land of Make Believe is in danger. The children and the toys must join in battle against the rotten royal rodent to save the magic of Christmas and restore the Prince to the throne.

"Delightful, Gorgeously and thoroughly enjoyable," said one past audience member. "The children were gripped from the moment we walked in".

Tickets cost £10 (family tickets) and group bookings available on 01252 745444 or online at [farnhammaltings.com](http://farnhammaltings.com).

### Strictly judge lights up Woking stage

You shall go to the ball, dah-ling! The godmother of all pantomimes *Cinderella* is a strictly fabulous production, ticking all the boxes for family entertainment this year at The New Victoria Theatre in Woking.

Craig Revel-Horwood steals the show as the wonderfully wicked step-mother Demonica, brilliantly evil and no dance dancer when it comes to strutting his stuff.

The cast also includes consummate professional Paul Chugkles as Baron Hardup with Paul Butler as Buttons bringing the house down with their comely antics.

The ugly sisters were appropriately grotesque and hilarious in equal measures offed by very strong performances by Cinderella and Prince Charming playing it straight.

While there are no surprises from the story, the sparkling sets, fabulous dance routines and music from the ever-popular *Greatest Showman* brought this classic to life.

Risque asides from Revel-Horwood kept the adults entertained and slapstick antics from Chugkles and Butler had the kids rolling in the aisles.

Highlights for us were Revel-Horwood's attitude and costumes getting bigger and spanglier as the night went on – and the epic surprise at the interval. If you're looking to book an outing that will keep everyone entertained and enthralled over the festive season, then this is for you.

HELEN JENKINS

### We'll drink to that!

Comedian Al Murray is on his way to Camberley.

The comic known as the Pub Landlord is playing at the town's theatre on Saturday, June 29 as part of his *Hope and Glory* tour.

He says: "Our new tomorrow beckons. A new tomorrow that smells reassuringly of yesterday, but with wit."

"One last leave and we will be there. And when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Although the going won't get tough and anyone who tells you it's going to be tough is lying."

"Come join me to marvel at the majesty of our green and pleasant land. A land globally renowned for our culture, history and places, like the world-famous Salisbury Cathedral. Join me to step backwards into the future."

Details are available from [www.camberleytheatre.co.uk](http://www.camberleytheatre.co.uk)

# Wintershall Nativity a timely antidote to Christmas cash-in

## The Nativity

A deep red added extra sparkle to the glowing performance last Friday night of the much-loved *Wintershall Nativity*, staged in and around a wintry 18th-century hilltop barn near Bramley.

A true family affair, it started out small in 1989, acted to a few friends, and has grown to become one of the country's best-known nativities.

Holly Barn is now a licensed theatre with staged seating, and the production features colourful biblical costumes, sophisticated lighting and sound effects. But it retains its heartfelt warmth and joyfulness 29 years on – and also many of its original cast.

A pillar of the production is estate owner Peter Hutley, now in his 90s, who not only created the *Wintershall Nativity* and improves on it each year, but also acts in it with his equally committed wife Ann. This year, they were two of the four playing Simeon and Anna.

Their daughter Charlotte de Klee is producer and the latest additions to the Hutley family, babies Rex and Ludo, were among the eight babies taking it in turns to play Jesus – and miraculously, sleeping angelically all through it on Friday night.

They may not be Hutleys, but the



The three kings Melchior, Caspar and Balthezar with Jesus in Holly Barn at the Wintershall Nativity (picture: Jo Pomeroy)

50-strong cast of long-serving amateur actors are definitely family, creating a tight-knit and loving emotional core to reinforce the central message of togetherness, peace and goodwill.

It's not just the humans who have given the nativity their all – Chester the donkey has been a stalwart for many years.

Throughout, the audience is made to feel an integral part of the performance. In the field outside the barn at the start, the crowd prays to allow Mary (Bethany Lickess), Joseph (Liam Driver) and Chester through and walks with them

to the barn, where they pleased to be allowed shelter.

The action continues outside with cheery shepherds warming themselves around a real fire – and the dramatic spotlight appearance of Archangel Gabriel (Kathy Longbottom) up a tree to announce the glad tidings, before the audience take their seats inside.

Bethany and Liam brought real pathos to their roles, as a couple who were almost torn apart by the concept of a Virgin Birth, also voicing their emotion powerfully in their solo songs.

A dreadlocked Herod (Daniel Freer) was splendidly evil as he charged into the barn with his soldiers. Luckily he was no match for the warrior-like Archangel Michael (Adrian Hoff), who dispatched him into the fires of hell in a flurry of smoke and pyrotechnics.

Once again, directors Kathy Longbottom and Ashley Herman did an outstanding job, as did music directors Rachel Musgrove and Stuart White and the Wintershall Singers.

For information about 2019 Wintershall Plays go to [www.wintershall.org.uk](http://www.wintershall.org.uk)

BEATRICE PHILLPOTTS

# A beauty of a panto at the Princes Hall

## Beauty and the Beast

It is a year of anniversaries for the Princes Hall pantomime. This year's production is the 25th which Robert Hopkins has produced, directed and acted in at Aldershot, and it is 15 years since Donovan Christian Cary put on the frocks, wigs and outrageous accessories at the Princes Hall to become the best dame in the business.

Looking back through my files I find it is the 15th time I have reviewed an Aldershot panto. That may not be much of a milestone but coincidentally I find the first one I wrote about was *Beauty and the Beast*.

Back in 2006 I expressed surprise at the huge improvement I had seen over previous offerings (when I wasn't a reviewer). It was, I wrote, "altogether slicker, tighter and more entertaining than those I'd seen before".

Over the years the team has kept up these high standards and, if anything, this year's offering is more professional than ever, while still retaining the



2018 marks Donovan Christian Cary's 15th consecutive show at the Princes Hall. Donovan's accomplishments include winning Encores' Best Dame' award.

warmth that has always set the show apart from others.

The Aldershot team knows what it is doing. Many of the actors have worked together before with Robert and Donovan, including Rachel Lea-Gray,

back; Simon Pontin as The Beast/Prince; and Tom Capper as Flambé.

They were joined by newcomers Klauze Saunders as Fairy Fift, and Paul Grunert as Billy (Belle's father); as well as a lot of dancers, many of whom I'm sure had been in previous pantomimes here.

Two of them also decorated a costume which must have been uncomfortably hot – to my delight there was a pantomime horse, Laryngitis (he's a little horse, gosh! Groom.)

The standard of singing, dancing and acting was high, perhaps the best I have seen here, the sets were sparkling, the music and choreography were excellent, the jokes were as awful as ever, and the energy and enthusiasm were unflagging.

Above all, the warmth and good humour permeated the auditorium and ensured this was a real feel-good show for everyone in the family.

*Beauty and the Beast* runs at Aldershot's Princes Hall until December 31. For tickets and information call 01252 329 155 or visit [www.princeshall.com](http://www.princeshall.com)

who as Belle was clearly enjoying her seventh Princes Hall pantomime; Samuel Wright (a horribly full-of-himself Gaston) who had such a good time last year in Aldershot in his first professional pantomime that he hurried

back; Simon Pontin as The Beast/Prince; and Tom Capper as Flambé. They were joined by newcomers Klauze Saunders as Fairy Fift, and Paul Grunert as Billy (Belle's father); as well as a lot of dancers, many of whom I'm sure had been in previous pantomimes here.

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STELLA WISEMAN

### Davro hails 'best ever' pantomime



Four decades in: Panto vet Bobby

It's the best pantomime I've ever done and that's in 37 years of doing them," says comic Bobby Davro who plays Ick Jack in *Dick Whittington* at The Mayflower, Southampton.

It is his witty repartee that holds this two-hour show together with some hilarious sketches including the sweetshop scene where he tells a love story using chocolate bars.

His impressive memory is twice put to the test while describing wonky donkey and when reciting the countries of the world.

There is mention of Brexit on a couple of occasions and Donald Trump doesn't escape either. "When I Trump it smells," Bobby retorts.

With fat jokes including "Your buttocks have different postcodes..." and immigration quips such as "The was so slow at cleaning it took him five hours... He was a Slovak".

The kangaroo sketch ends up with Bobby collapsing in a heap on the floor, which is where Suzanne Shaw ends up, too. The cast clearly enjoy themselves, which is infectious.

A somewhat weak storyline is strengthened by performances from scary Steve McFadden, Andrew Ryan, who plays an excellent dame, Joe McElderry, Sheila Ferguson and Suzanne Shaw.

Engaging songs, audience participation, lots of laughs, fantastic dancing and there is plenty of mesmerising costumes especially from scary Steve McFadden, Andrew Ryan, who plays an excellent dame, Joe McElderry, Sheila Ferguson and Suzanne Shaw.

Special effects include a large scary rat at the beginning and a flying red London bus, which dazzes my son Henry, too. But the music is just too loud for my wife and little ones.

Light clevering ends the show with Dick's cat seeming to vanish into thin air.

On until January 6, 2019. TIM SAUNDERS

## Entertainments

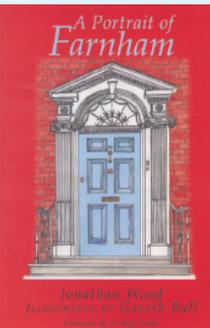
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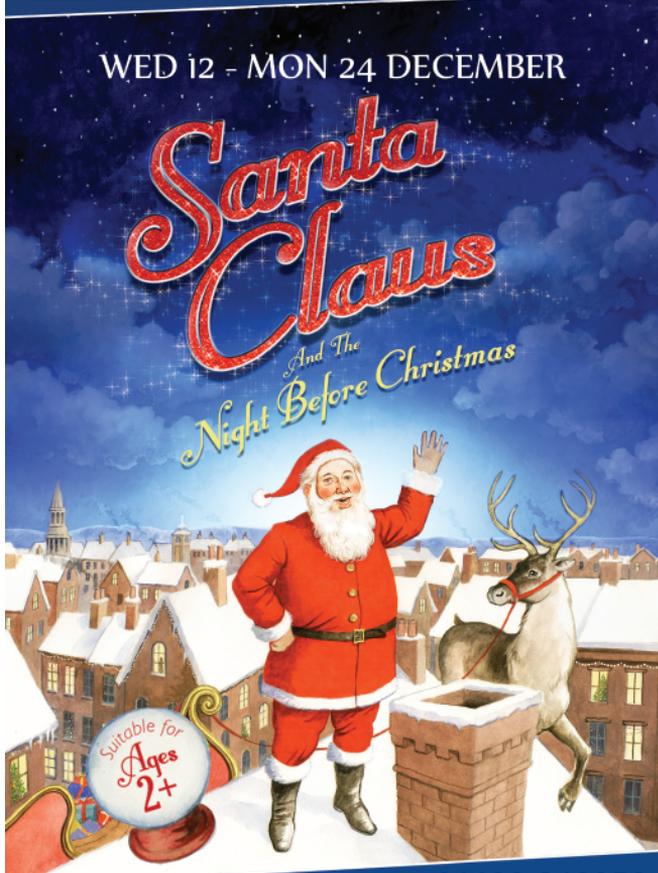


**WED 12 - MON 24 DECEMBER**

# Santa Claus

And The Night Before Christmas





Suitable for Ages 2+

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