

Society : SPT
Production : Agatha Twisty and the Murder in Pantoland
Date : 23rd January 2026
Venue : SPT
District : 14

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Overview

Agatha Twisty and the Murder in Pantoland is an ambitious family whodunnit pantomime by Warren McWilliams. In principle, the idea of blending Agatha Christie-style mystery with pantomime conventions is a fun one, and at times the production shows flashes of real inventiveness, particularly in its staging, visual design, and a handful of standout performances. However, the script itself proved to be the greatest challenge of the evening: it felt poorly constructed, lacked momentum, and ultimately didn't hang together cohesively, which made the show feel far longer and more laboured than it needed to be.

Act One, recorded by the stage manager at approximately **1 hour 26 minutes**, felt long on the night and impacted the overall pacing of the production. While audience participation and ad-libbing undoubtedly contributed, the rhythm still suffered. Given the inherent wordiness of the script and its natural run time, firmer editorial cuts would, in my view, have greatly benefited clarity, momentum, and sustained audience engagement.

That said, the company worked incredibly hard, and there was no shortage of commitment on stage. Act Two, in particular, felt more focused, with stronger energy and clearer ensemble interaction - a reminder of what this production could be with tighter control and greater cohesion.

The Performances

Agatha Twisty – George Apap

George approached the role with commitment and a clear understanding of the demands of a front-and-centre pantomime performance. However, while Agatha is written as a detective rather than a traditional Dame, in performance the character is still presented as a man in a dress with Dame-adjacent isms, and the characterisation did not land cohesively. Greater warmth, bolder physicality, and more varied comic detail — with less reliance on repeated gags such as the 'glasses routine' — would have added variety, sparkle, and a stronger sense of balance on stage.

Wadsworth – Sarah Miall

Sarah approached the role with boundless enthusiasm and sustained energy, making excellent use of the stage and every opportunity to engage the audience. Her physicality and commitment were commendable. At times, however, the contrast in energy between Wadsworth and Agatha Twisty felt

unbalanced; some softer, more grounded, almost maternal reactions from Agatha could have helped counterbalance Wadsworth's exuberance and create a more cohesive central pairing.

Queen Jezebella – Emma Fuller

Emma was clearly battling a sore throat throughout the performance, and full credit to her for pushing through professionally. Script issues aside, she delivered her lines with clarity and a deliciously devilish charm, capturing the essence of a pantomime villain. Her chemistry with her sidekick was particularly strong, and vocally she managed her performance sensibly under difficult circumstances.

Igor – Gordon Bird

Gordon was, without question, the standout performer of the evening. He struck exactly the right balance between exaggerated pantomime villainy and grounded character work, with excellent physical comedy and comic timing throughout. His grotesque sidekick energy was a joy to watch nicely judged, confidently delivered, and consistently engaging. Really excellent work.

Aladdin – Teddy Secular -Clarke

Teddy was a delight on stage, bringing fantastic energy, a strong singing voice, and real charisma to the role. Having seen Teddy previously in *Calendar Girls*, it was wonderful to see such flexibility and range as a performer. Their interaction with others – particularly in the laundry scene was lively and confident, and they clearly shone whenever given space to play.

Wishee – Marco Sale

Marco complemented Teddy well, creating a believable and playful partnership. His reactions and timing supported the comedy effectively, particularly in shared scenes, and he maintained a consistent presence throughout. A solid, dependable performance.

Cinderella – Jessica Widdicombe

Jessica brought calm poise and sincerity to Cinderella, grounding the role nicely amid the busier elements of the production. Vocally gentle and emotionally sincere, she provided a steady anchor. With stronger costume emphasis, her character could have stood out more distinctly from the chorus.

Dick Whittington – Karen Payne

Karen delivered some of the evening's highlights, particularly her interactions with Queen Jezebella and the dream sequence. Her performance had warmth, clarity, and confidence, and it was lovely to see the continued tradition of the classic pantomime thigh slap embraced with such enthusiasm.

Beauty – Muireann O'Donnell

Muireann played Beauty with poise and charm, offering a calm and assured presence on stage. She worked well opposite her Beast, and her performance felt sincere and grounded. A small prop choice such as a book could have helped reinforce Beauty's character traits more clearly.

The Beast – Wilson Lang

Wilson delivered his lines well and managed the physical restrictions of the costume effectively. He worked solidly within the limitations of the role and maintained character throughout. A commendable effort.

The Dwarves

- **Dock: Hannah Hillier**
- **Happee: Karen Todd**
- **Doh-Pee: Karen Bird**
- **Sleepie: Tiena Elliot**
- **Sneezee: Nadine Masseron**
- **Bashfool: Kaitlyn Chishick**
- **Grumpee: Neil Coupland**

As a group, the Dwarves worked well together, showing strong ensemble awareness and good comic timing when the script allowed. In some group scenes, dialogue was difficult to hear, which appeared more related to diction and vocal projection than sound. With greater vocal clarity, their comic moments would have landed more effectively. Karen Todd stood out as a particular highlight, bringing clarity and humour to her moments on stage.

Mrs Potts – Barbara Richards

Barbara played Mrs Potts with warmth and charm, offering a gentle sincerity that was very appealing. Her voice carried a reassuring quality that suited the character well. A lovely, heartfelt performance.

The Postman – Benita Venables

Benita delivered her lines well, despite the rather odd nature of the scripting. The gag that the Postman makes others look foolish didn't quite land, and with stronger directorial emphasis, this could have been a much bigger comic moment.

Fairy Bowbell – Beth Everied

Beth brought warmth and a sense of magic to the dream sequence, supporting the scene beautifully. Her presence helped soften and elevate the moment. A quietly effective performance.

Tommy the Cat – Aurora Standfield

Aurora had an opening vocal at the start of the show and handled it confidently no small task.

The Chorus

Supported by Joseph Morby, Emily Widdicombe, Sophie Pope, Emily Sutton, Rebecca Chishick, Jessica Shuttleworth, Penny Langford Leask, and Matthew Radford, the chorus worked hard and performed capably. However, there was little sense of shared enjoyment or excitement, and greater confidence building and stage presence would help them shine more fully as an ensemble.

Creative Team & Production

Director **Matthew Chishick** clearly worked hard to manage a large cast and complex staging, with some strong visual moments - particularly the detective sequence in Act Two. However, greater focus on character balance, pacing, and overall energy would have strengthened the production. With a script of this scale and complexity, more assertive editorial shaping would have allowed the plot to breathe, improved momentum, and sustained audience engagement more effectively.

Musical Director **Lara Savory** selected material that suited the vocal capabilities of the cast, though the song choices lacked the upbeat drive and vibrancy traditionally associated with pantomime. The band, **Lara Savory, Andrew Shapland, Gary Pollington, Martin Carrick, and Helen Cuthbertson** played well but were not sufficiently 'heroed'. While the mix itself was competently managed, the overall musical presence felt restrained; greater emphasis through amplification, use of reverb, and some character-specific play-on and play-off music would have added atmosphere, energy, and momentum.

Choreography by **Gilly Meek** was clean, crisp, and effective, adding depth whenever movement was used. Stage management by **Sam Turner** was well organised, though scene changes would have benefitted from greater pace. The limited use of blackouts caused transitions to feel clunky.

Lighting and sound, operated by **Patrick Naylor, Pete Ashton, Graeme Rhodes, Tom Grady, and Cate Naylor**, showed moments of strong technical creativity - the washing machine scene being a particular highlight - but were not used consistently to maximise atmosphere. Lighting could have been pushed further, especially in principal cast back-story moments.

From a sound perspective, the mix itself was well balanced and competently delivered; however, the overall impact felt restrained. Having seen *Just So* and *Calendar Girls* at Shinfield, where the band was fully hero'd and the sound carried real punch, this production lacked some of the vibrancy and 'oomph' traditionally associated with pantomime, which would have helped lift the energy and momentum of the show.

The set design and construction team **Di Capel, Natalie Clarke, Tim Howling, Yvonne Mitchell, Steve Toon, and Graham Smith** deserve huge praise. The painted backcloths were vibrant, playful, and impressively executed, creating multiple locations with real visual flair. Costumes by **Debbie Wheeler, Cate Naylor, Sara Shuttleworth, and Graham Smith** were well thought out, particularly for the principals, and no mean feat given the scale of the cast. Wigs and make up **Pam Dennis** complemented the designs nicely.

Props by **Debbie Wheeler, Graham Smith, and Charlie Clark** enhanced the production effectively, with running gags (particularly around Queen Jezabella) adding layers of humour without overwhelming the action.

Final Thoughts

As ever, Shinfield Players offered a warm and generous welcome - it genuinely feels like a second home now, and that hospitality is always appreciated. While this production faced significant challenges, particularly with its script and pacing, there was no shortage of effort, talent, or commitment on stage. With firmer editing, clearer character balance, and more assured artistic choices, this company has all the ingredients needed to deliver a truly cracking pantomime in the future.