



[Dick Whittington](#)

at Opera House, Manchester

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) December 2017

Qdos Entertainment are back, and have not skimped on budget to bring you this year's thrilling SFX masterpiece. Costumes and set are wonderful and colourful, songs upbeat and catchy, music great, and the special effects and pyrotechnics are simply the best I have ever seen in any pantomime ever - including Rudolph pulling a sleigh out over the audience. Later on in the show, a large shark was doing the same, whilst the lovers have a lovely tableau in front of a giant Catherine Wheel.

Praise also needs to be given to **Phil Corbitt** as an evil King Rat, and **Jacqueline Hughes** as The Good Spirit of Bow Bells, for still continuing with the spirit of pantomime in the face of adversity.

Ryan Kayode

was a Mancunian Tommy The Cat, though I never did quite understand the reason for his being in this panto since he didn't kill the rats and hardly ever appeared at the same time as Dick.

Lauren Hampton

was a lovely Alice. Her traditionally English good looks and pleasant singing voice made her the perfect love-interest, but sadly she too was underused in this show and even at the end when she marries Dick Whittington, had to be content to take her curtain call several actors before him when they should have come on together to confetti throwing. Whilst perhaps the most underused actor this evening was

Kage Douglas

as Sultan Vinegar, whose only purpose it seemed was to be there so that Barrowman could make some more comedy out of his own, not the character's, sexuality.

Please don't misunderstand me - this is a very good, highly entertaining, slick and competent show; what it is not however is traditional pantomime, and the humour of the show goes above and beyond the usual and accepted double-entendre that is part of that tradition. I was laughing heartily at most of tonight's scripted and improvised sections, but I am not the panto's target audience. There were several instances - far too many in fact to write here - where the boundary between acceptable and lewd adult humour was crossed.

Moreover, this was not a traditional pantomime, despite it starting as such. To begin we had the baddie enter stage left, and the good fairy enter stage right and they both talked in rhyme. Super. But sadly that was where the pantomime element of this show stopped. There was no Dame, there was no Principal Boy, there were no audience responses at all throughout the show - Oh no there wasn't! They didn't have a traditional song sheet and invite children on stage, they didn't involve the children in the story, they didn't do any of the known and loved panto routines, except for a very long-winded and self-indulgent version of The Twelve Days Of Christmas.

So what did they do? Well, they made a half-hearted attempt at shoe-horning a Dick Whittington storyline in around tired Krankie routines and Barrowman ego. The jokes and routines included Wee Jimmy Krankie putting his / her hand down the front of her trousers and sticking a finger out to look like a penis, and the number of gender references from this 70 year old performer, who we all know on stage as a young boy not a sexy Madonna lookalike exposing her butt cheeks, were simply a step too far. We even had one song end with the words... 'Alice, Alice, who the... is Alice'.

Barrowman was sadly just as guilty too. For such an enigmatic and charismatic performer who obviously loved what he was doing and did it extremely well, why did he see the need to descend into homosexual adult banter at every opportunity.

There was in the second act an underwater sequence for which we were all given 3D glasses and indeed the effects in this sequence were very clever. However they were MUCH too scary and realistic for their target audience and not at all suitable.

Finally, as all traditional pantomimes do, and this was no exception, a local dancing school are asked to provide juvenile chorus. In this instance it was The Stalder Academy Of Dance. I can only feel immensely sorry for the youngsters who are involved in this show. They are extremely underused and underexposed (in the correct sense of the word). They were shoved to the back of the stage each time they appeared except for the shop sequence when they were given silly comestible costumes to wear. They did not do any dancing of their own and in fact were totally unnecessary, and need not have even have been on stage. Unforgivable.

With stars such as John Barrowman as Dick Whittington, and real-life husband and wife duo The Krankies, this should certainly be a crowd-puller and crowd-pleaser, but I would advise only going to see this show if you are a child of at least 18 years old!