



## Cinderella

at The Dancehouse, Manchester

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) December 2017

Eight Freestyle and The Dancehouse have been collaborating and producing pantomime for the past 4 years and so this is their 5th pantomime together. Cinderella is such a classic story for panto, and so trying to strike that balance between finding something new and keeping it traditional can be a very hard one.

This one however was a masterclass in 21st century pantomime. It was by far the best panto I have seen in a very very long time. All the traditional elements of the Cinderella story were kept, with a couple of nice little asides too such as the fairy needing to gain her wings, the baron being a failed inventor, and lots of modern day references like Tweeting, Facebook, selfies etc; whilst many of the known and loved panto set pieces were kept in, along with the audience responses which are so much a part of that tradition. The cast worked the audience excellently and took

time to make us all feel complicit with the story. There were lots of jokes in the show too, plenty of verbal and visual gags for the youngsters and plenty too to keep the parents entertained without smut and vulgarity. The music was upbeat and highly modern, the sets, especially the palace interior, were fabulous, and the lighting, effects and pyrotechnics spot on.

In other words this was a pantomime which revered and wallowed in the time-honoured traditions of the genre but was also able to add the things necessary for 21st century children to relate to, using modern 'speak' (OMG and later for example), putting local references into the show, and keeping the whole show upbeat and relevant with popular music of our time. Superb.

Kate Mitchell was stunning as a rather un-fairy-like fairy who wasn't very good at magic and needed to get her wings. The balance between 'theatre' and breaking the fourth wall was excellent, and enjoyable every time. Helena Frances was a delightful Cinderella, traditional in every respect, whilst her dashing prince was the upright and charming Adam Urey. Baron Stoneybroke was the very likeable Steven Jaqueson; Dandini, the traditional principal boy, Emma Parker; the two ugly sisters Veruca and Hernia, who became more and more outrageous on every entrance were Jon Howson and Matthew Chappelle, and I am leaving the best until last. Red Redmond in the role of Buttons, traditionally the hardest role in this panto as he is the one who needs to work the audience the most, and once he has them on his side, finds that he doesn't get the girl of his dreams after all....I loved the roller shoes, and we all were rooting for you, despite already knowing the story.

With a talented ensemble of 7 adult chorus and a large group of dancers from local dancing schools, the stage was never bare, and the quality of the dancing was some of the best I have seen in panto ever. There were two teams, and each team had dancers from two different schools. Team Tiara took dancers from The Dance Academy and Heatherlea School Of Dance, and the team that I witnessed this afternoon, Team Slipper, were dancers from Debut Arts Academy and The Danceworks, Eccles.

If I have to be negative at all, then there is one thing which I truly hate, although so many companies are resorting to it these days, one assumes as a cost-cutting exercise, and that is the use of playback and not live music. The music was on occasion too loud, but since everything else about this panto was excellent, I can overlook this.

Director, Sean Canning has every reason to feel immensely proud of this show. I iterate, one of the best pantomimes I have ever seen!

Merry Christmas!