



[Dick Whittington](#) at Oldham Coliseum

By Fine Time Fontayne and Kevin Shaw

Reviewed by [John Waterhouse](#) November 2017

Panto-season is traditionally the time many theatres clean up financially after what may have been an otherwise lean year and it is not hard to see why. Just as weddings and funerals are often the only time many people step inside a church these days, so too that pantomimes are when many walk into a theatre, largely because children still want to see them. That's all well and good and the **Oldham Coliseum** panto retains a reputation as one of the most popular in the region, boasting a stunning three-month run.

By definition, pantomimes are formulaic and audiences expect nothing less, instinctively knowing when to shout 'behind you', retort 'oh yes it is' and boo the villain. At Oldham, the predictability has been largely extended to include the members of the cast and the routines

with certain ghost and cookery sketches appearing annually with the same regularity as winter colds and the Queen's Christmas day address. **Fine Time Fontayne**, once again, appears in a stunningly different costume with almost every stage entrance, usually for no discernable reason at all.

The visual effect **Dick Whittington** is a blaze of colour from start to finish, with impressive back-cloth images, aided by imaginative lighting and vibrant, sometimes gorgeous costumes. The pace is very tight right from the start and well maintained, with slick scene changes, although for the most part very little staging and few props. In terms of everything you would expect from a traditional panto, this show has pretty much all of them but unfortunately not much else which might surprise or delight.



One thing which sets this panto apart from previous Christmas shows at Oldham Coliseum are

two excellent new faces, both making their debut at Oldham. **Miley Rose** as Tom the Cat excels with a stunning combination of ballet and acrobatics which give real life to a mute character through facial expression and feline movement, and

Nina Shadi

in the title role of Dick provides a strong and cheerful lead, with the two performing as a great double act throughout the show. Mention must also be made of

Simeon Truby

as King Rat, who makes an amusing villain, whilst at times bringing an almost dark spiritual element to show, referring to evil and singing a song with references to Hell, whilst having a look somewhere between a gothic punk and a Hell's Angel; a genuinely original villain.

Another welcome change to the usual helping of panto fodder was the dancing, which in addition to the excellent movements of the cat, included some remarkably acrobatic rats performing front-flips and other routines. Full credit to the chorus troupes from a local school.

One area in which the Oldham panto could be improved is to include some elements which adults can relate to,. As a children's show, *Dick Whittington* is an honest offering of children's entertainment but makes no attempt to operate on anything other than that level.

If you are looking a non-stop romp of a panto, with an energetic cast, popular songs, great costumes, vibrant visuals and some impressive choreography, all of which will keep the children hooked, *Dick Whittington* will not disappoint, but if you have been the panto at the Coliseum every year for the last few years, expect few changes in cast, plot or show routines. When I asked my young nephew what he thought of *Dick Whittington*, his immediate reply was 'Well, it was the same as last year really!' I rest my case.

***Dick Whittington* runs until 13th January 2018.**