

## TREASURE BEYOND THE DREAMS OF AVARICE

With Rain or Shine you never know quite what to expect. We came prepared to sit outdoors under drenching rain (it has happened before) but the wonderful staff at Llancaiach Fawr took pity and moved the show inside. Meanwhile the fickle South Walian weather confounded every forecast to give us a warm and balmy evening that we could only watch through the windows - or should I say portholes.

Just the sort of evening in fact that you might expect to find in some remote tropical latitude where Jim Hawkins' ship lies becalmed and his motley crew entice him into telling the story of his cabin boy days, when he first went to sea aboard *The Hispaniola* and sailed for Treasure Island.

Now, here we were, both crew and audience sitting under the low beams of Llancaiach Fawr and for all the world imagining ourselves on the gun deck of a great ship while Cap'n Hawkins told us of Long John Silver, Blind Pew, Black Dog, Israel Hands, Ben Gunn and that long lost pirate captain of *The Walrus* - J. Flint. Oooh Arrrr! Ooops! Oooh Arrs are forbidden... real pirates didn't talk like that apparently. Instead they said things like "The same broadside old Pew lost his dead lights, I lost my leg" and "He was a master surgeon him that ampytated me." And again Ben Gunn's plaintive wail, "Sometimes I dreams of cheese, toasted mostly."

Yes, all your favourite lines and characters are faithfully retained in this brilliant adaptation by James Reynard of R L Stevenson's "Treasure Island." There's even a talking parrot - called Captain Flint, incidentally - which is something you should know, as it is a regular pub quiz question. The parrot rattles on about "Pieces of Eight" and even manages to survive everyone else, (you'll learn how!). Long John Silver, played on one and a half sea legs by James Reynard himself is a magnificent larger than life fellow running the gamut of sides to his complex and duplicitous character from thug to lovable rogue to saver of the enterprise.

Rain or Shine are known and loved for their improvisations, conjuring enduring images from a few boxes, bells and rattles. Conjuring a whole ship indeed from a long piece of twisted cloth, a blond wig and a couple of coconut shells. Anthony Young has never looked so moody or magnificent!

As usual the company all play many parts, switching roles back and forth with dazzling speed and great finesse. Now they are pirates, now they are gentlemen fighting under the colours, now the poor family who run the Admiral Benbow. Usually, however, each character is played only by one person - except for... well, you'll just have to see the show.

Tyler Coombes makes a wonderful Captain Smollett with a real Nelsonian swagger, resplendent in a blue coat and sash. But is this the same Tyler who is playing George Merry the cutthroat who almost does for Long John? Michael Skellern manages to look fierce and vicious at all times unless he is playing one of the good men and true when he embodies rectitude and 'dooty;' or, with a squawk, Cap'n Flint himself. Pippa Meekings throws herself about the stage with great abandon, here a pirate threading through the swamp, squelch-ooop, squelch-ooop and fighting with sword and musket and now the gentle mother of little Jim, played by the ever youthful Claire Tucker, along with Long John, the star and narrator of the show. She (or should it be he?) climbs intrepidly up the mast rigging pursued by Flint's evil and injured gunner, Israel Hands. If you've read the story you will know what happens but I have to say that that piece of action is worth the price of your ticket alone.

Mad Ben Gunn, the maroon, is played by the magnificently innocent and swivel eyed Rob Keeves. We know Ben Gunn is mad because he lives on an island full of goats, dreams incessantly about cheese, but never thinks of making it from goat's milk.

The costumes as ever are all stunning (and they tell me washable, too, just in case the weather isn't so kind). Jayne Lloyd conjures these up when she isn't going eyeball to eyeball with Billy Bones as Dr Livesey and making the pirates stick out their tongues.

So there we are; another wonderful show and something that we will remember and think about for a long time to come.

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