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Jack and The Beanstalk

Steve Bennett

Exeter Northcott Theatre

3 December 2018–6 January 2019

With a plethora of panto and alternate Christmas offerings to choose from in the region, *Jack and the Beanstalk* is a gentle, straightforward, low-key family show.

Directed and written by Steve Bennett, who also plays the Dame, all the formulaic boxes are ticked: baddie, goodie, fairy, grotesque cross-dressing harridan, panto cow, love interest and—here—a huge, inflatable beanstalk. Add the expected kids on stage, sing-along, and slapstick and there is nothing for children not to like.

Bennett steals the show as Dame Dotty Trott with the required range of over-the-top costumes on point (thanks to Pippa Ebbage and Amelia Perry) while Noel White provides the one-bauble-short-of Christmas naïvety as Silly Billy no mates.

Surprisingly lavish for a home-grown affair, costuming and set are sumptuous—from L-plate Fairy Mistletoes's silver Converses to Fleshcreep's top hat, and from the Trott's Malteaser-strewn garden to towering giant's castle.

Mark Jardine's Fleshcreep is nasty indeed, the stuff of nightmares with bravado and bluster but tempered by his rhyming battles with goody glittery two shoes Mistletoe while the avid people-eating giant is big, green and ghastly.

The young chorus are excellent—as all-singing and dancing village children, and as “Time Warp” ghosts guarding the portals—as are the exuberant company duo which doubles up as bovine beauty Daisy.

Paul McClure on keyboards directs the score with something for all age ranges; Nat King Cole to *The Greatest Showman* with Jack (Jessie May) and Jill (Victoria Lucie)'s vocals strong.

A clever sweet-based story is a highlight and an interesting moralising justification for stealing the golden goose is tacked on for PC-ness but overall there is little engagement with the audience, more a feel of getting through the script regardless of audience interaction.

But my seven- and nine-year-old companions loved it.

Reviewer: [Karen Bussell](#)