

British Theatre Guide

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Jack and the Beanstalk

Richard Bean, Joel Horwood, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm and Ché Walker
Lyric, Hammersmith
(2009)

The first panto of the season combines all of the traditional facets of this uniquely British art form with a very contemporary feel.

The story of the boy who sells his cow for a bean (not the co-writer) or five is re-modelled with the appropriate setting amongst the meerkat traders of Hammersmith.

Tom Robertson's boyish Jack lives with his Mum Wendy, played by experienced Dame Martyn Ellis who certainly knows how to win over an audience.

He is in good company, as in their different ways, three other actors also get their share of laughs. Angela Wynter is Evelyn Greedly, a sweetly evil character who would as happily eat children as beat her good-natured sidekick, Plug.

Sean Kearns in that role is at his best enjoying Plug's odd foible. This dim Irishman is unable to hear a song lyric without bursting into Karaoke mode, only stilled by a much-used frying pan to the head.

Best of all is horny hermaphroditic Spanish bull, El Especial, played by the incredibly funny Javier Marsan.

When Jack leaves the terrestrial zone for somewhere a little more heavenly, he meets not only his very own Jill (Natalie Best) but also a truly scary gap-toothed Gog the Giant in a world that seems to owe something to Roald Dahl. This slave driver has the deepest of voices, lent for the occasion by Patrick Stewart a very long way from *Waiting for Godot*.

It is not surprising that with four playwrights collaborating the writing can be a little uneven but at its best, the evening should prove very funny for audience members of all ages.

The kids will love the sweets and singsong, as well as the chance to hiss and scream the time-honoured panto phrases, although these are used pretty sparingly.

Their hangers-on from a generation or two above will get many laughs, although the glamour is a little lacking until Natalie Best proves herself to be W6's very own mini-Beyoncé, as the happiest of endings beckons.

Steve Marmion's modernised tale does well to bring the action to the theatre's doorstep and is helped by Tom Scutt's design and especially a Monty Pythonised giant puppet that cannot have cost as much as it seems.

There may not be the biggest names appearing in this theatre's first venture into the genre for thirty years but *Jack and the Beanstalk* has enough attractions to sell well and persuade new artistic

director Sean Holmes to repeat the experiment on an annual basis in future.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)