

## 'It's Snow Time in Little Dribble'

Whilst it has to be admitted that the 'Little Dribble Players' presented no serious threat to the 'Royal Shakespeare Company', the amateur dramatic society brought a great deal of pleasure and amusement to the good folk of Little Dribble ... much of the amusement quite unintended.

'The Players' put on three productions each year. In Spring the audience would be treated to a comedy and in Autumn to a 'whodunit'. (Which turned out to be the funniest often being a matter of luck). Christmas was, of course, the time for the pantomime. Comedy ... 'whodunit' ... pantomime. The pattern never varied. Until this year. Little Dribble couldn't believe the news. There was to be no pantomime. Speculation as to reason for this extraordinary turn of events was rife. Could it be because of the slight 'mishaps' that had occurred in recent years?

Three years' ago the village was treated to Jack and the Beanstalk. Jack, alias Minnie Monks from the village shop, (considered rather too old for the part by many), was only halfway up the beanstalk when it collapsed under her not inconsiderable weight. Fortunately, apart from a nasty bruise on her bottom, Minnie suffered no serious injury and, true trouper that she was, carried on as though nothing had happened. True, Jack having never reached the giant's castle in the sky did rather play havoc with the plot but this was a situation not unfamiliar to the 'Little Dribble Players' or to its audience.

The following year it was Cinderella. Lucy Shaw was playing the part of Prince Charming. She knew, of course, that the glass slipper belonged to Cinderella and should never had said with such enthusiasm, "It fits! It fits!",

whilst trying it on the foot of one of the Ugly Sisters. Afterwards she could only put it down to a moment's aberration, possibly caused by the child in the front row informing his mum in a very loud voice that he was going to be sick.

Last year Aladdin took the stage. Percy Small, the 'props' man and general factotum, assured them that the artificial smoke that would envelop the genie when he made his entrance would be no problem. (Percy had many excellent qualities, one of which was his optimism!) Rehearsals went without a hitch but, on reflection, Percy had to admit that it was probably a mistake to make the artificial smoke appear more real for the actual performances. It just hadn't occurred to him that *more real* smoke would set off the fire alarms. But no real harm was done. The fire brigade was very understanding and it was simply a misfortune that it was pouring with rain when the audience had to be evacuated from the village hall.

In fact, it had been Marcus Goodfellow, 'The Players' rather flamboyant producer, who'd proposed at their Annual General Meeting that the long established tradition of a Christmas pantomime should be dropped. His proposal was greeted with gasps of disbelief ... some gasps being little short of horror. Indeed, Annie Long, reaching for her smelling salts, insisted that Christmas without a pantomime in Little Dribble would be on a par with Christmas without roast turkey, Christmas pudding or the Queen's speech.

"But, my dears," Marcus continued when the hubbub had died down, "no pantomime doesn't mean no performance." He waited patiently for someone to ask him what he meant. The 'someone' in question was Percy Small. "What I mean, dear boy, is that 'The Players' will put on the most spectacular variety show the village has ever seen. Two glorious hours of

non-stop song, dance and comedic sketches, all appropriate to the Season of Goodwill."

Such was Marcus's enthusiasm, it was soon agreed by all that a variety show was just what Little Dribble needed to make its Christmas complete. Even Annie Long began to warm to the idea and, before long, had convinced herself that she had been the one to think of it.

"What are we going to call it?" Minnie Monks asked. "The variety show, I mean."

"Can't we just call it a variety show?" Annie Long asked. "Everyone will know what that means."

"No, it needs a catchy title," Bob Walker, who invariably played the villain in the Autumn 'whodunit', joined in the conversation. "Something that will make people sit up and take notice. How about, 'It's Show Time in Little Dribble'?"

"What an excellent suggestion, dear boy ... absolutely first class!" Marcus said, approvingly. "But, bearing in mind we're putting on a *Christmas* variety show, do you think we could make a slight change to your suggestion and perhaps call it, 'It's *Snow* Time in Little Dribble'? Do you think that might be even more appropriate?"

Everyone did, so 'It's Snow Time in Little Dribble' it became. The very title Marcus had entered into his diary weeks ago!

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Following the pattern long-established with the pantomime, the first performance was to be on Christmas Eve, the next on Boxing Day and the third the day after. At the beginning of December, posters appeared in the

village shop and other strategic places throughout the village proclaiming:

The Little Dribble Players present  
'It's Snow Time in Little Dribble'  
A Grand Variety show for the Festive Season  
Bring your family and bring your friends

And so, throughout December, 'The Players' met three times a week in the village hall for rehearsals, Marcus directing proceedings with his usual aplomb:

"No, no, my dears! More oomph! More oomph! You need more oomph!"

"Very nice, Minnie, but not *quite* so loud, my love ... not *quite* so loud. A tad more *pianissimo* next time, perhaps?"

"Higher! Higher! Get those legs up higher! It's meant to be a cancan, not a can't can't!"

And so on.

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Before they knew it, Christmas Eve was here. It had been a stroke of genius on Marcus's part to invite children from the village school to audition for parts in the show. Not only were their renditions of 'Frosty the Snowman' and 'I saw mummy kissing Santa Claus' a delightful way to begin the show, but the mums and dads who came to see their children perform ensured a full house.

After the children had done their part, 'The Players' took to the stage

and, for once, everything went swimmingly. The dancing, the singing, the sketches ... all with a Christmas theme ... being greeted with warm applause from the audience. 'Oomph' was there in abundance; Minnie remembered her pianissimo; and, in the cancan, legs reached the required height ... well, more or less. What was more, none of the disasters of recent pantomimes occurred. In short, 'It's Snow Time in Little Dribble' was proving to be everything that Marcus Goodfellow had predicted it would be.

But, in true show business tradition, Marcus had decided before rehearsals began to save the best till last with the entire ensemble on stage for the grand finale. A great deal of preparation would be needed to achieve what he had in mind but it would be worth it. This would be something Little Dribble would never forget.

Under Marcus's direction, Betty Brown, their pianist, had somehow managed to put music to the line, 'It's Snow Time in Little Dribble *and*' ... then a dramatic pause and straight into 'Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer'. Percy Small was then called upon to make a sledge for Father Christmas, complete with four small wheels.

And then the *pièce de résistance!* The audience wouldn't believe it. It would bring the house down. Bessie Green had been only too pleased to lend her pony 'Christabel' for the three performances and it was apparent to all that the good-natured creature was chuffed to bits to be transformed into a reindeer. Complete with a brown coat, a magnificent set of antlers made by Percy and, last but not least, an enormous red nose, Christabel became Rudolph. A sledge pulled by a reindeer! Undoubtedly the most ambitious project 'The Players' had ever undertaken.

And so the moment for the Grand Finale arrived. Giving it all they'd got, the entire cast launched into song. 'It's Snow Time in Little Dribble *and*' ... dramatic pause ... 'Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer'. The audience gasped with wonder and disbelief then broke into spontaneous applause as, in his sledge, Father Christmas, (a role Marcus had reserved for himself), was pulled onto the stage by a *real* reindeer.

Hearing such enthusiastic applause, beneath his bushy white beard, Marcus positively glowed with pride. He knew that he'd achieved nothing less than a triumph. A triumph that would be remembered in Little Dribble for years to come.

And then it happened!

Whether it was a case of first-night nerves or sheer misfortune is a matter for speculation but, right in the centre of the stage, nature got the better of Christabel. Marcus never suffered from first-night nerves so it must have been sheer misfortune that, when alighting from the sledge, he stepped right into what Christabel had deposited. With a certain grace, he went sliding across the stage, his beard going in one direction, his sack of toys in another and half of the front row of the chorus ending up on their posteriors as he careered into them.

Not only did the pony's misdemeanour bring Father Christmas down with a bump it also brought the house down with uncontrollable and uproarious laughter, shouts of 'encore' resounding around the hall. This was, indeed, an evening that would be remembered in Little Dribble for years to come.

Outside the village hall the first flakes of snow began to fall.

