

# Aladdin - NODA Review

**Author: Mags Sheldon**  
**Information**

**Date**

13th December 2025

**Society**

Bispham Castaways

**Venue**

Holy Family Church Hall

**Type of Production**

Pantomime

**Director**

Debbie Flavell & Amanda Knapp

**Written By**

Ben Crocker

Bispham Castaways are a local Blackpool charity dedicated to promoting community participation in theatre, and that spirit was evident from the moment I arrived. This is a warm, friendly, welcoming group, with a clear commitment to making theatre accessible, whether you're interested in performing, directing, writing, tech, costumes, front of house or simply finding a supportive creative community. Their inclusive ethos (including a willingness to help if membership cost is a barrier) is something many organisations could learn from, and it's an approach that really matters in today's climate.

This year's panto of choice was *Aladdin* by Ben Crocker, a pantomime that sits firmly within a much-loved UK tradition. Panto is often a first step into theatre for performers and audiences alike: a shared, multi-generational experience built on laughter, participation, and the joy of live performance. Bispham Castaways clearly aim to make that experience as open and inclusive as possible, ensuring that anyone who wants to get involved can do so, regardless of background or experience. That ambition is admirable, and the company looked as though they were having a great time bringing it all to life.

The production was directed by Debbie Flavell and Amanda Knapp, supported by a hardworking team: Ian Fleetwood (Technical Director and sound), Alan Westhead (lighting), John Robinson (sound and curtains), and Hayley Price (sound effects). Front of house was led by Angela Crossley, Cordy Jones and helpers, who helped

create a friendly welcome. Costumes and props were produced and sourced by the cast, resulting in a bright, fun look that suited the panto style well.

In performance, the company maintained a buoyant, “all-in” energy, and there was a genuine sense of ensemble enjoyment on stage. Martin Thompson’s Abanazar anchored the villainy with a satisfyingly scheming presence, while the principals and supporting cast embraced the demands of panto storytelling with clear commitment. Susan Hope’s Aladdin was open-hearted and likeable, and she also proved quick on her feet, ad-libbing deftly whenever heckling cropped up and keeping the audience onside with easy confidence. Conor James’s Widow Twankey wasn’t the typical take on the role, but it was all the more enjoyable for that: distinctly funny, and witty in the moment. Graham Wilcock’s Emperor had just a hint of an “evil” edge, enough to add flavour and mischief, but never so much as to unsettle the younger audience members. Ian Dodd’s Genie of the Lamp brought a welcome sense of showman sparkle, alongside Harry Chambers as the Genie of the Ring, who offered a bright counterpoint. Fern Crump’s Wishee Washee played the loyal sidekick with engaging earnestness; it is also worth noting that Fern joined the cast once rehearsals were already well under way, had a substantial amount of text to absorb at speed, and didn’t falter at all. Tyler Mercer’s Nobby the panda, though silent, contributed through expressive physical theatre and well-judged reactions, and, having joined late in the process too, slotted in seamlessly. Katy Randall’s Sergeant Ping and Taylor Clark’s PC Pong made a spirited double act, bustling cheerfully through the action. Hayley Price played Princess Jasmine with a poised, spirited quality, supported by Ian Langley, Ceri-Ann Corcoran and Shannon Jones as ensemble, who kept the stage picture lively and cohesive throughout.

With pantomime, the shared sense of fun, participation and togetherness is at the heart of the tradition, and that was very much present here, with a committed company clearly enjoying the experience and bringing the audience along with them.

Technically, there was much to admire. The society’s approach of investing each year in additional kit is paying dividends: the lighting was good and used effectively, adding atmosphere and lift where needed. Sound effects, created by Hayley Price and operated by the team, were well chosen and well-timed, supporting the action neatly without overwhelming it. I was also offered a full tour of the performance space and technical set-up by the tech manager, which spoke volumes about how proud the group are of what they’re building, and rightly so.

It was a shame that the matinee audience was not larger, because the company deserved more support for the work they put in and the welcoming environment they create. Local theatre lives and breathes through community attendance, and

Bispham Castaways are providing a space where people can belong, learn skills, and share creativity across generations, from 16 right up to members in their 80s.

A lovely final touch came at the end: a photo opportunity for children in the audience to come onto the stage with the cast. Moments like that remind us exactly why pantomime, and community theatre more broadly, remains so important. Bispham Castaways may be a relatively new company, but they are already succeeding in something even more vital: building an inclusive, encouraging and joyful theatre community.

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