

Zoom Talk: The Magic of Pantomime

Delivered on: 9th December 2020

Haywards Heath & District Probus Club

Given By: Ian Gledhill



The Magic of Pantomime!

The Magic of Pantomime

On 9th December 2020, members of Haywards Heath & District Probus Club and others were treated to an excellent talk by Ian Gledhill. Ian explained all the mysteries of pantomime as he delved into the history of this peculiarly British institution, interspersed with personal anecdotes from his years of working and appearing in pantomime. Really great and entertaining stuff.

Origins

The origins of British Pantomime probably started in the middle ages and blend the traditions of the Italian “*Commedia dell’ Arte*”, and the British Music hall to produce the art form that is Pantomime.

“*Commedia dell’ Arte*” was a type of travelling street entertainment which came from Italy in the 16th century. It had a repertoire of stories that were played out in fairgrounds and marketplaces. The troupes were often made up of family members who would inherit their characters, costumes, masks and stories from their parents or grandparents. Nowadays, pantomimes are nearly always based on well-known and loved children’s stories such as Peter Pan, Aladdin, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and so on.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Some information in this paper has been sourced from: [Pantomime Scripts](#) | [Limelight Scripts](#) and [The History of Pantomime \(historic-uk.com\)](#)

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Ingredients (what every pantomime must have)

- 'Goodies' and 'Baddies'. It's not a proper pantomime unless it has a fairy Queen and the Demon King.
- The 'Principal Girl'. Nearly always played by the prettiest female in the cast.
- The Chorus and the Juveniles. The element of song and dance in Pantomime is extremely important as is some well-choreographed slapstick.

Like every good story, a pantomime has a plot and characters and of course, an ending.

The plot is very simple: The girl dressed as a boy who is the son of a man dressed as a woman, will win the other girl (surprisingly dressed as a girl), with the assistance of a person(s) dressed in an animal skin, or something along those lines. The confusion is part of the fun.

Goodies and Baddies

Every pantomime has, or rather must have, goodies and baddies as Limelight Scripts explains (click [here](#)):

The fairy Queen and the Demon King appear in all pantos, although their exact guise and title may differ. From Old King Rat to modern Fairy Liquid, Peter Pan and Hook, names vary according to the location and topicality of shows, but certain stage directions nearly always hold strong. Good enters from stage right and Evil from stage left.

This tradition of Evil entering from the sinister side goes back to the mystery plays and the few working star traps [through which the demon used to be projected in a puff of smoke] can always be found in the down stage left position. This tradition seems to echo medieval times when the entrances to heaven and hell were placed on these sides.

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About the Speaker



Ian Gledhill, a Brighton resident, is an Arts Society Accredited Lecturer. He was a professional stage designer in his younger days. Ian told us about pantomimes... the traditions and superstitions and lots more. His talk was peppered with personal anecdotes drawn from his many years of working and appearing in pantomimes with many stars of the stage and television.

Screen shots from Ian Gledhill's Talk >>

