

ENTERTAINMENT

THEATRE REVIEW

Elgin's Jack is thundering good fun

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

★★★/★★★★

WHERE: A traditional English Christmas pantomime at the Elgin Theatre, 89 Yonge St., Toronto

WHEN: Now to Jan. 4

TICKETS: \$30 for children, \$40 to \$60 for adults at 416-872-5555

By STEWART BROWN
The Spectator
TORONTO

Heath Lamberts is playing the dame and that's all you really need to know about Jack And The Beanstalk.

Trotty — Dame Trotty — is her name. She's Jack's dotty mother and in the farcical hands, feet, face, body and voice of Lamberts, she's a constant comic scream in this year's traditional English Christmas pantomime at the Elgin Theatre.

"I'm Trotty, a woman of substance," she croons. And she is. Even though she suggests, with some exaggeration: "You couldn't tell the difference between us if Madonna had this face."

First, there's the getup: A red wig with pigtails, rouged cheeks and lips, yellow canvas sneakers and a frantic, outlandish wardrobe of gaudy bonnets and frocks covering an ample frame.

Then there's the demeanour — so benign and naive, it enables Lamberts to trip non-sequiturs, double-entendres and the raunchiest ditties off his tongue with the innocence of a dowager passing gas at a church tea.

This dame enters, humming "Away, away, with fife and drum," then gleefully acknowledges the audience: "Oh, you're HERE! Now I can SMILE, again!"

And she, and we, are off to the races.

With comic cohorts such as Ross Petty, Simon Bradbury and Bruce Dow, who are no slouches themselves, Lamberts' Dame Trot hilariously embellishes the facts.

"Jack was conceived during a power failure. He's not too bright," she acknowledges.

Later, she suggests: "Give some people enough rope and they'll start to macramé."

Still later, simmering in a giant's stewpot, Dame Trot laments: "I'm too young to be an *ingredient!*"

Well, you get the drift. That macramé line aside, subtlety has never been one to barge into an English Christmas pantomime, and producer Petty and company aren't about to spoil a good tradition here.

Jack And The Beanstalk is a lively two hours, plus intermission, of buffoonery, songs, dancing, bright costumes and substantial fairy-tale scenery from an accomplished cast of 15.

Jeff Hyslop, also directing and choreographing, is Jack, hampered a bit in his dancing by a knee wrenched in rehearsal, but gung-ho to rescue Princess Apricot (perky Camilla Scott of Crazy For You, Due South and her own BBS talk show) from the clutches of an evil giant atop the monster beanstalk, and his henchman, Killjoy, played by Petty.

Clambering along with Jack on the side of the righteous are Lamberts' Dame; Jack's chum, Simple Simon (the



Jeff Hyslop, left, is Jack, Camilla Scott is Princess Apricot and Ross Petty is Killjoy in Jack And The Beanstalk.

Special to The Spectator

knockabout comic, Bradbury); and Apricot's father, the dithery King Crumble (Dow). Keeping a protective eye on things is Lola, a Cockney good fairy, played by Mary Ellen Mahoney.

Though there's a terrific 12-foot giant, manipulated by Randy Ganne, Petty's Killjoy is the significant villain of the piece.

It's a role Petty relishes, letting him prime the audience for two-way insults, and generally get away with cornball murder as far as the jokes go.

With panto, everything's giddy as all get out, so be prepared for lots of gags about Toronto-the-Ever-Growing and new Mayor Mel Lastman and the Mike Harris Stomp (holering "Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!" with each heavy step).

There's plenty for children, too, from seven or eight on up. And don't you dare leave the seniors at home. But please don't take pre-schoolers; the show runs too long for them and they'll be scared stiff by the thunder and lightning and amplified voice of the giant.

Actually, a good taste of these shows will come Christmas Night at 8 p.m. on the CTV network when Robin Hood, last year's panto, will be aired.