

Beanstalk is a magic gift for Christmas

It's almost Christmas, after all, so it seems kind of fitting that Ross Petty Productions' annual Christmas panto was almost firing on all cylinders in its opening night performance Thursday at the Elgin Theatre.

In fact, one suspects that were it not for actor/director/choreographer Jeff Hyslop's knee injury — the extent of which remained undetermined at the opening night curtain — this might have been the best panto in years. It's that close.

This year, Petty and his crew have chosen to put some English on the timeless tale of *Jack And The Beanstalk*, tarting up the tall tale of oversized legumes with the addition of several panto traditions.

Hyslop stars in the title role, with stage and screen star Camilla Scott playing Princess Apricot, his love interest. Simon Bradbury joins the fray as Jack's boon-if-none-too-bright companion, Simon, while Bruce Dow essays the role of clumsy King Crumble with appropriate zeal. Thanks to them, the story remains firmly tied to the apron strings of Mother Goose and her gang of fanciful compatriots.

But this is panto, of course,

so Mother Goose et al provide but a starting point for this annual flight of Christmas fancy.

As usual, Petty dons the garb of the man children love to hate in this festive season. As Jack's nemesis, Killjoy, Petty thrives on the boos and hisses that greet his every entrance.

Then, of course, there is the dame, a staple in the panto larder, and comic actor Heath Lamberts lards up the role of Dame Trot, Jack's three-time-widowed mother, to maximum effect, proving conclusively that he is even funny in his sleep.

Mary Ellen Mahoney rounds out the panto periodic table, bringing an element of ditzy de-

light to her portrayal of Fairy Lola, Killjoy's arch enemy, while Randy Ganne proves that talent comes in the giant economy size.

Their storyline decked with any number of purloined musical numbers and underscored by Hyslop's charming, folksy choreography, the cast, supported by an enthusiastic eight member corps and the occasional wandering politician (Mayor Hall, the best of sports 'til last), serves up an evening of not-quite-dizzying good cheer for the entire family.



John COULBOURN
THEATRE



But these are early days in the rush towards Christmas, and judging by how hard these folks were working to please on opening night, they're going to dazzle once they get down to playing.

HEATH LAMBERTS ...
A wonderful Dame Trot in *Jack And The Beanstalk*.

SUN rating (OUT OF 5)



JACK AND THE BEANSTALK
The Elgin Theatre