

The Nativity Play

Hello, I'm Gladys who helps Harold the caretaker clean the Flatley church hall. In my official capacity, my title is Assistant Sanitary Operator which in my day meant charwoman. Anyway, I also help out backstage at the Flatley Amateur Acting Society-F.A.A.S-pronounced Farce. The Director is usually the Vicar's wife Stella or rather Stellha as she calls herself with a "ha" at the end, which is like most of her productions. This was no less true of her Nativity Play offering with the F.A.A.S Juniors, ranging from four and a half to ten years old.

It became a farce right from the start when Doreen Day's Mum complained loudly that she hadn't paid for her daughter to attend stage school for her to end up as the backend of a donkey! Stellha had to do some very quick thinking and responded that Doreen had volunteered for the part on account of her being so shy. "Shy" shrieked Mrs. Day, and proceeded to list all the Shakespearean main parts her nine year old daughter had starred in, until Stella had to promise that Doreen could make the Donkey's bray rather than the child at the front head end.(Although I don't know what the audience thought of a bray coming from the donkey's rear!) She also said she'd devise a dance for the donkey's rear legs-that's Doreen's legs of course. I think Stellha had been in a Rolly-Polly's tribute dance troupe at one time.

Due to the rapid spread of nits in the Infant and Junior Schools, there hadn't been much time for rehearsals, so not everything went as Stellha had planned.

For instance, Five and a half Mary Mudge playing Mary the chosen one, wouldn't let go of her favourite doll-alias the baby Jesus, so walked on stage behind the donkey carrying him or rather it, which gave a whole new meaning to Joseph's proclamation. "Behold my wife if with child," and it seemed to the audience in this bizarre version of the nativity, that Mary was having twins!

Meanwhile, no one had noticed that Joseph was chewing bubble gum, so when he opened his mouth to announce, "Here we are in Bethlehem," in reply to Mary asking, "Are we there yet?" a huge pink bubble erupted from his mouth and popped, subsiding over half his face in a sticky mess.

From then on things went from bad to worse, when he tripped over the hem of his dressing gown, colliding with Mary's back, whose baby Jesus shot out of her arms and was propelled towards the front row of the audience. Fortunately Jake's Dad was goalie for Flatley football Club so caught the projected doll before it knocked someone out, but not before Mary started wailing and had to be pacified by Mrs.Berry the prompt.

Once order was restored, questionably helped by Tom announcing "Normal service will be restored as soon as possible," Joseph remembered to ask if there was any room in the inn, much to Stella's relief I can tell you. Now, ten year old Tom the innkeeper had been learning about improvisation recently,so launched into a soliloquy explaining why all the rooms in his pub were taken by football fans before the big match between Bethlehem Wanderers and Flatley Ladies teams the next day. However he did have an empty garage they could borrow if they didn't mind sharing it with an Ox and an old John Deere tractor. "Stable" stage whispered an exasperated Stella from the wings.

As for Doreen's dance, the costume leg had been sewn too narrow for her to use so she had to make a hole in the costume body to push her own bare leg through, which then looked as if the donkey had three back legs with the third one flapping about. To make it worse the young ukulele player accompanist strummed the "Little Donkey Carol at double speed because he wanted to visit the sweet shop before it closed, so poor Doreen had to gyrate the donkey's rear end and kick her legs furiously until it seemed that the donkey had been bitten by

a horse fly-and what's more, the child at the head end fell over!

All went reasonably smoothly after that, with only a minor catastrophe when an over eager young shepherd plonked his gift of a lamb on Jesus in the manger, which if in real life would have suffocated the baby, and so a very annoyed Mary showed her anger by chucking the sheep back at said shepherd who immediately threw it back at her again in a bizarre game of lamb ping-pong, and I think only the pupils on the front row heard the second king donate his gift of Frank and sense, which sent them into suppressed giggles. On reflection, sense would have been a pretty good gift, although I don't know if baby Jesus would have appreciated Frank as a playmate.

Anyway, the upshot was that the " Flatley Herald" reported that the F.A.A.S's Juniors' Nativity play was a unique stellar performance- which of course it was. I'm not sure what Stellha's plans are for the group next year, but I don't think she'll be volunteering to direct the Nativity play.

Oh, I must run or the over seventies netball team will be banging on the church hall door demanding to be let in. So Cheerio!- And Merry Christmas!