

Something for the Weekend

BY BARRY NICOLSON

We fall in love on stage...but we are nothing like The Krankies

THEY are theatre's oddest couple — two fellas who just can't help falling in love... professionally, at least.

Scottish panto stalwarts Allan Stewart and Andy Gray are back at Edinburgh's King's Theatre once again this year, delighting children and adults alike in a rib-tickling production of Cinderella.

And not for the first time, the two old friends end up living happily ever after come curtain call.

Unlike another popular panto double act, however, their relationship is perfectly chaste.

"No, I had no idea about the Krankies!" cackles Allan. "I've known them for years, but I can honestly say there was no sign of their swinging.

Married

"I don't think our characters would get up to that sort of thing — Andy and I talk about getting married in the show and we **NEARLY** kiss, but that's as far as it goes."

In an unusual twist to the well-worn tale, this year's eye-catching production casts Buttons — played by Andy — as a father figure, rather than a love interest, to Cinderella. That paves the way for romance to blossom with Baroness McSquirrell, played by Allan, Scotland's best-loved panto Dame.

"It's the same every year," laughs Allan. "I fancy him, he fancies me, and eventually we get together — in a non-sexual way, of course."

In fact, Allan and

Andy have ended up together so many times now, they've long since lost count.

"We've never actually agreed on a figure for how many pantos we've done together," admits Andy. "I think it's about 11..."

"Whereas I reckon it's ten," says Allan. "But it's in double figures now."

Not surprisingly, they are in agreement about what makes for good panto. Allan says: "On the kids' level, they've got this fairytale going on with great illusions and lighting and magic, but both of us really go for the grown-ups getting big laughs."

"Plus we're also daft enough to keep the kids entertained," adds Andy. "I mean, kids love farting. And we've got a major farting scene in this one, which is a real joy to see the kids and the parents roaring with laughter at."

They first appeared together in a King's Theatre production of Cinderella over a decade ago but this year's show — boasting a dazzling array of costumes, musical numbers, fake snow and Shetland ponies — is their most spectacular yet.

They've already set a new record for ticket sales at the King's and, despite the old showbiz adage of never work-

ing with children or animals, everything has gone swimmingly so far. Which hasn't always been the case...

"We had doves in the last Cinderella we did," says Allan. "And they were a nightmare. They were 'trained' to fly on to Cinderella's head, but they were all over the place."

"Another year, we had a dog that was supposed to run into Andy's arms, but it came on, took one look at him, then ran off!"

Then there was the time Allan's flight up from London was delayed by two hours, forcing Andy and co-star Grant Stott — appearing again this year as ugly sister Gobina McPhlegm — to improvise without him.

"Grant and I were up onstage singing Christmas carols trying to keep the audience going until Allan arrived," laughs Andy.

"He was only about ten minutes late, but it felt like an eternity."

"Obviously, with Grant and I not being comics, we had no material whatsoever. So we sang the longest version of Jingle Bells you will ever hear, making up verses as we went along."

Which is, of course, what friends are for.

● **Cinderella runs until January 22 at King's Theatre, Edinburgh. To book tickets (£12.75-£23.25) call 0131 529 6000.**



THE ASPS

WHO: Paul Dourley (vocals/guitar/keys), Chris Simpson (guitar), Craig Renwick (bass), Michael Barry (synth/keys), Graeme Renwick (sax), Lewis Hutchison (drums)

WHERE: Edinburgh

FOR FANS OF: Pearl Jam, The Killers, Kings Of Leon

JIM SAYS: There's no denying these Edinburgh boys are thinking big. That's reflected in their epic sound and vision.

I got a sneak preview of where they are at a few months back when I visited them during studio rehearsals.

They'd certainly come a long way since I'd first seen them. With a fresh line-up and new focus, the hard work is starting to pay dividends.

Frontman Paul Dourley told me: "What's important to us is that we enjoy the process of writing, rehearsing and performing our music



NEW MUSIC

BY JIM GELLATLY

together. Over the course of two years we have matured our sound and, with the introduction of a sax, have added another dynamic to our music."

The sax has certainly had an effect, along with the keyboard parts, giving The Asps a more complete sound.

The music industry has already started to take note. The band have been forging a very healthy relationship with online music portal ReverbNation.com. Through that, they hooked up with veteran producer Ron Nevison, whose credits include The Rolling Stones, The Who, Led Zeppelin and Bad Company.

Paul said: "Ron offered us the chance to record a 10-track album with him in San Francisco." The recording was to take place last year, but has

been put on hold until this summer after The Asps were chosen to take part in Live Connection.

They were invited to record three live tracks at the O2 Academy Islington in London. They are now available to hear at live-connection.co.uk.

Through the initiative, the band are also set to sign a publishing deal with Sony/ATV and release their track Keep through Live Connection's fledgling record label Hz Music.

Though spiced with 80s New Romantic glitter, The Asps are a classic rock act, which may be why Nevison took a fancy to them. Overall, they have the potential to rock the biggest stages. Coupled with their ambition, The Asps are most definitely a band looking forward rather than back.

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● **Jim is playing The Asps on In: Demand Uncut — Sunday 7-10pm on Clyde 1, Forth One, Northsound 1, Radio Borders, Tay FM, West FM & West Sound FM — see jimgellatly.com**