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NEWS 11

Dedication shines through

The St Albans Gang Show, produced entirely by volunteers, is something of an institution selling out the Alban Arena year after year. Former Cub Scout **NEIL SKINNER** went to see what all the fuss was about.

SITTING uncomfortably at the back of the Alban Arena, it's hard to believe that many of the performers on stage are as young as 11.

The St Albans Gang Show has a reputation for quality and Thursday evening's performance was something very special indeed.

Scouts, Cubs and Guides have gathered annually at the venue for each of the past 28 years and the show's popularity speaks for itself: more than 4,000 ticket sales – 96 per cent purchased on the first day of sale – for its five fun-filled performances.

From finely polished musical numbers to tightly scripted comedy sketches, the Gang Show ebbs and flows with all the precision of a west end musical – a remarkable achievement given the wholly amateur cast.

"We were delighted with the show," volunteer producer David Barker said.

"We have a very young cast but they did brilliantly well.

"Other shows have a nearly all adult cast but that's just not the point of our show – it's about young people.

"For that cast to put on a show like that takes such a lot of hard work and dedication – that's something we stress to them from the start."

Such dedication is typified by the superb lighting and musical backing

that support the show – both of which are provided by volunteers.

But the real stars of the show, of course, are the young people who've spent more than four months rehearsing for it.

Chief Scout and former Blue Peter presenter Peter Duncan said: "I don't go to all the gang shows but St Albans is one of the best. It's a very impressive show.

"You've got 115 young people on that stage at a very high standard and really giving it their all.

"Performing on stage is one of the most empowering things that can happen to a young person.

"Sure, you've got one or two extra special performers – there always are – but to the others this is just a great opportunity for them to get up on stage and experience what it's like."

Indeed, this is what the show is all about.

Even though a couple of the cast should be seriously considering a career on the stage, for most the show represents a personal triumph; the culmination of months of arduous rehearsals and the realisation of a theatrical dream.

And that is the charm of the show, with the odd muffled punch-line or leaping octave serving only as reminders of what cast and crew have



The St Albans Gang Show lived up to its reputation for quality.

managed (again) to pull off – a triumph of a show.

These are ordinary kids – not stage-school wannabes – doing extraordinary things through good old fashioned grit and determination.

As I scramble to my feet to acknowledge a rousing rendition of God Save the Queen – the show's traditional swanson – I feel a strange rush of national pride.

Thoughts of happy slapping hoodies are pushed well to the back of my mind as I reflect on the endeavours of a truly remarkable group of young people. I'll even admit to a surreptitious sing-song on the icy walk back to the car!



