

STAR RETURNS AS SLEEPING

BEAUTY Despite her tender years, Tesni Jones, is already a well-known local entertainer, who has been performing around North Wales for more than a decade. *She spoke exclusively with Don Hale (pictured centre below) prior to the start of rehearsals for her new show. Pictures by Stéphanie Durrant.*

Born on Valentine's Day 1985, Tesni, who comes from Mochdre, made her very first public debut when aged just 4, singing 'Bobby's Girl' at the Village Hall. As her talent developed, she was asked to make further appearances during VE celebrations when aged 10, and again four years later, when she competed in a Song For Europe.

Tesni has always been keen to develop both her singing and acting talents and when she was 17, attended Llandrillo College, at Llandudno, for two years, gaining a B-Tech diploma in music and drama.

During this period, she also helped form a popular three-piece all-girl band, Pheena, taking a major part in organising the vocal and harmonies.

Inspired by her grandmother's love of legendary artists Billy Holiday and Ray Charles, and determined to enhance her own experiences of R'n'B, jazz, blues and gospel music, she later opted to promote a solo singing and performing career.

Tesni has a rare passion for music and song writing and loves to spend hours in studios

developing new ideas and working on lyrics with producers and composers.

Since leaving College and promoting her career, she has worked with a host of top names including Charlotte Church, Bonnie Tyler and van Morrison and last May was given the opportunity of a lifetime by performing live on stage before 25,000 spectators as a support act at Tom Jones' 65th Birthday Concert.

Held at Ynysangharad Park, Pontypridd, and known as Ponty Park, Tesni admitted to being 'very excited and a little bit nervous' prior to taking to the stage and performing four songs with a five-piece set.

"It was brilliant," she said. "I was thrilled to bits. I have always wanted to sing and act – and like them both just as much."

She has been seen on the Welsh TV channel S4C, and has also been much in demand for appearances with stars such as Jools Holland at the Brecon Jazz Festival.

When Tesni last played Theatr Colwyn two years ago, she was a part-time but very ambitious student, but now she returns as a full-time professional, and much sought after

all-round entertainer.

It is often said that she has a 'perfect pitch' voice, and at the time of writing was all set to perform the lead role of Princess Beauty in a 'Great Dame & Sleeping Beauty,' alongside co-stars Michael Fordred (Dame Dolly Dimpling) and Paul Callen (The Prince) - who also made a return visit to the venue after starring in last year's pantomime.

"It's great to be back in my home town," Tesni explained. "I love acting and singing and this time all my family and friends will be able to come and enjoy the panto."

"They are always great fun and provide lots of entertainment. I hope everyone will come and see us. I first met Michael at the press launch in November and I am really looking forward to the show, and to working with him and my other colleagues."

Despite a hectic schedule, there seemed little respite for the petite star and when the pantomime concludes, she remains determined to return to the studio to resume her singing career, recording several new tracks with a soul band for release next May. ■



THE LIFE OF A TRAVELLING

DAME Michael Fordred is a professional pantomime Dame, who, when not appearing in top festive shows, spends much of his time travelling the country talking about the origins of the ever popular event. *Report by Don Hale.*

TO be confronted by a six-foot two pantomime Dame in full and brilliant costume outside one of North Wales' most intimate theatres is quite an experience. But for professional Dame Michael Fordred, it seems this is a normal way of life, as he is hardly ever out of costume, or apart from his highly colourful make-up and lifestyle.

Michael, who lives in Northampton, is a chatty, amusing and very knowledgeable theatre extrovert, who is always ready, willing and able to tell of his exploits throughout theatre-land, and share some of his many and unique experiences.

For several decades, he has entertained thousands of parents and children during annual festive pantomimes, and over recent years, he has opted to spend his entire time in panto mode, travelling the country to act as a compere, and to talk with WI groups, schools, and at dinner dances, extolling the virtues and origins of his noble art.

Last Christmas, Michael starred in Dick Whittington at Southend, and in recent times, has appeared in many other festive pantomimes – mainly at seaside resorts –

including Cinderella at Skegness; starring with so many famous names, including comedienne Dora Bryan.

He is very well known in the world of entertainment and says he loves playing a Dame: "This year at Theatr Colwyn, I will be playing Dame Dolly Dumpling," he explained.

"It's a great role. I love being a Dame – and it also gives me the opportunity for ad-libbing. I love a live audience."

Michael was first attracted to the stage and this particular role, as a child, when he watched the legendary and magical performances of Billy Daintry and Jack Tripp.

He quickly learned stagecraft, and soon developed to become one of the country's most sought after Dames, playing the leading role in many popular productions. He owns a host of stunning costumes and still remains passionate about the retention of small theatres.

He said: "I love working in small theatres. People need to preserve them. The public often don't realise the work that goes into rehearsing – and all the back-stage work. It's all down to teamwork. It's very hard work,

but it's also most enjoyable."

He was looking forward to this year's production of 'Sleeping Beauty' and added: "I know people will enjoy the show. I do hope people will come and support the theatre. It's great fun, and it's still a great form of live entertainment - and helps to keep us all going."

SLEEPING BEAUTY, organised by New Pantomime Productions Ltd, runs from Saturday December 17 until Saturday December 31, at Theatr Colwyn, Abergelge Road, Colwyn Bay. Tickets priced at: Adults £8.50, Children £6.50 and concessions £7.50 are available from the Box Office, Tel 01492-532668/872000. Theatr Colwyn website: www.theatrcolwyn.co.uk

To Win Free family tickets for two adults and two children for this show. All you have to do is confirm the name of Princess Beauty. Please put your name and address on a postcard and send it to The Editor of North Wales Living, 22 Penrhyn Road, Colwyn Bay, LL29 8LG. (* Usual NWN competition rules apply).

