

Hackney is one of the most diverse places in the UK. In this regular feature, we profile the borough's great & good or just plain interesting

hackneypeople

There is nothing like a dame

By Sylvia Arthur

CLIVE Rowe is the consummate pantomime dame. Oh yes he is!

Described by *The Guardian* as 'one of the greatest', the Lancashire-born thesp has become a Hackney institution.

In the seven years he's been playing here, Clive has cultivated a loyal local following who turn out in force each Christmas to see him camp up his dramatic chops.

Last year, he starred in Dick Whittington, this year Clive takes the lead in the Empire's production of *Mother Goose*. The show incorporates high-jinks and high drama to charming effect, with Clive the shining star in a stellar cast.

Set in 'Hackneytopia', the script is littered with knowing references to local life, but there's a serious message about community togetherness underlying the comedy. Clive says: "No matter where you go on the planet there are going to be people who spoil it for the rest of us. But I think in Hackney people really want to get on."

When Clive was growing up he wanted to be a chef or fine artist, but wasn't very good at either. Acting came naturally however. Now well respected in the industry, his dedication to pantomime has brought credibility to the genre. He's

appeared in some of the West End's best known shows, including *Carousel*, and *Gays and Dolls*, for which he won a coveted Olivier Award – theatre's equivalent of the Oscars.

"To have your peers, people that you respect, who are above you and have been doing it for longer, look at you and say, 'we think what you've done is amazing', is a great accolade," he says.

It's not just the theatrical establishment who have taken Clive to their hearts – Hackney has too. I suggest it must be his Northern charm. "Innit!" he jokes in a sketchy east London accent.

“The minute you're received here you're part of the panto and everybody is working towards a fantastic night”

"One of the things I've always felt about theatre, but is even more true with the Empire, is the show starts the minute you walk through the front door, not the minute you sit down in the auditorium and the lights go on. The minute you're received here you're part of the panto and everybody is working towards a fantastic night."



Clive has appeared in television, film

and on radio, but says he feels equally comfortable on the Hackney stage. Panto for him is as much a craft as any other kind of acting. "There's a difficult balance to get where you're keeping everything at panto level because you're playing to the five-year-olds. The trick is finding that core of it where you may be upset about something, but you're not doing Greek tragedy, you're not doing Chekov, it's panto." And Clive loves it.

"My thing is I have a great time," he says. "I spend all year being told what I can't do on stage and I get five weeks to do what I want. The fact is, I'm having a good time." And so are we.

MORE INFO

Mother Goose is at the Hackney Empire until 10 January. See What's On for further details and a chance to win tickets



Clockwise from above: Clive Rowe as *Mother Goose* this year; Princess the *Goose*; Clive as Sarah the Cook in *Dick Whittington* in 2007; and in less fancy attire

Curriculum Vitae Clive Rowe

- 1964 Born in Oldham, Lancashire
- 1967 Graduated from Guildhall School of Music and Drama
- 1983 First Olivier Award nomination for best supporting performance in a musical for *Carousel*
- 1987 Won Olivier Award for Best Performance in a Supporting Role for his turn as Nicely Nicely Johnson in the National Theatre revival of *Gays and Dolls*
- 2002-4 Stars as Duke in the BBC children's drama *The Story of Tracy Beaker*
- 2005 Stars with Danny Glover and Willem Dafoe in the Lars Von Trier film *Manderlay*
- 2007 Appeared in Doctor Who Christmas special *Voyage of the Damned*

