



Show Report

Altrincham Little Theatre

Cats Cradle

09 March 2026

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

PRODUCTION	Cats Cradle
SOCIETY	Altrincham Little Theatre
VENUE	Altrincham Little Theatre
GENRE	Drama
CAST SIZE	8
STAGE DIRECTOR	John Newman
STAGE MANAGER	Martin Carrick
LIGHTING DESIGN	Jan Taylor
SOUND DESIGN	Jan Taylor
TECHNICAL OPERATOR	Jan Taylor
PROPERTIES	Martin Carrick
WARDROBE	Nichola Taylor
COSTUMES	Alt Theatre Wardrobe & Sale Nomads
MAKE-UP	Nicola Taylor, Trish Shaw, Judy Baker
CONTINUITY	Barbara Steele
SET DESIGN	John Newman and Lisa Barker
SET CONSTRUCTION	Paul Blackwell, Martin Carrick, Don Hines, John Howe, Andy Peate, Alan Reidsma, Lisa Barker, Pauline Glover & Stephen Glover
SET CREW	Paul Blackwell, Martin Carrick, Don Hines, John Howe, Andy Peate, Alan Reidsma, Lisa Barker, Pauline Glover & Stephen Glover

CAST LIST

Peggy Fletcher	Rachel Barrington
Jack Frost	Richard Sails
Miss Merton	Jane Hyde
Sam Fletcher	Alex Clarke
Pamela Fulton	Jane Newman
Bob Marriott	Ade Godding
Sir Charles Cresswell	Stephen Moss
Sarah Fulton	Ashley Foster

DATE OF PERFORMANCE	Monday 9th March 2026
DATE REPORT PUBLISHED	Wednesday 11th March 2026
ADJUDICATOR ID	NSA0001
NSA LOGO ON POSTER	Yes
NSA IN PROGRAMME	Logo Only, No Banner
PROGRAMME CLASS	Best Essential Information

THE REVIEW

REVIEW WORD COUNT	1450
STRONGEST ELEMENTS	Atmospheric Stage Design

- The richly detailed set created an immersive period setting that immediately established mood, location and the underlying tension essential to a mystery thriller.

Strong Characterisation and authentic performances

- The cast delivered believable, well-shaped performances, with particularly strong characterisation and chemistry sustaining intrigue throughout.

Technical Cohesion

- Lighting, sound, costume and props worked in harmony to support the storytelling, enhancing suspense and production a polished, professional feel.

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Leslie Sands' Cat's Cradle is a play that relies heavily on atmosphere, tension and carefully sustained mystery, and this production succeeded in drawing the audience into its web from the moment the curtain rose. A great deal of thought, care and dedication was clearly invested across all areas, resulting in an engaging and highly polished evening of theatre.

First impressions count immensely in a production of this genre, and the stage design immediately established both period and place with confidence. Considerable effort and attention to detail had been invested by a highly skilled stage crew, and this paid dividends. The set was richly dressed, with wallpapers, scenic detailing and leather furniture all complementing one another to create a believable and lived-in environment. The staircase added dimension and practical movement opportunities, while the painted church and surrounding scenery helped broaden the world beyond the stage itself. Additional signage and carefully chosen set dressing enhanced the period feel and created an atmosphere that supported the suspenseful nature of the play. It was a set that invited the audience into the mystery.

Props were minimalistic yet entirely effective, with each item appearing era-appropriate and functional. In a production such as this, overloading the stage with unnecessary props can be distracting, so restraint was wisely exercised. One small practical note would be to remain mindful of reflective surfaces on stage; the clipboard used in one scene occasionally caught the light and reflected the spotlight into the audience. A minor point, but worth noting for refinement.

Costuming, sourced by **Nichola Taylor**, was another strong asset of the production. The wardrobe was very well suited to the period and clearly thoughtfully assembled. The dresses in particular were eye-catching, flattering and rich in colour, often contrasting beautifully against the set while remaining entirely in keeping with the era. Jewellery choices complemented costumes well and contributed to character definition.

Turning to the performances, the cast delivered a strong effort, each contributing to the suspense and intrigue of the piece.

Rachel Barrington, as Peggy Fletcher, delivered a confident and assured performance. Having seen Rachel in previous productions, it is evident she continues to go from strength to strength. There is a maturity and polish to her work that has elevated noticeably. Her stage presence was impressive; she carried herself with excellent posture, moved with confidence and purpose, and took ownership of the stage whenever she entered. Her pacing in delivery was measured and natural, and she demonstrated strong projection throughout. Attention to detail in make-up, jewellery and character presentation enhanced the role further. There was a composure to her performance that made Peggy both believable and engaging.

Richard Sails as Jack Frost gave a particularly strong performance and anchored much of the production with ease. He appeared relaxed and entirely at home in the role, clearly having devoted significant thought to characterisation. His comedic pacing was especially well judged, introducing lighter moments without undermining the tension. He commanded the stage naturally and brought a believable, grounded quality to the inspector. His dialogue was delivered at an excellent pace, and there was a naturalism in his performance that made the character highly watchable. He captured both authority and humanity with skill.

Jane Hyde, making her society debut as Miss Merton, made a very positive impression. It is always encouraging to see new performers step onto the stage with such confidence. Her characterisation was well considered, supported by a convincing accent, strong projection and expressive reactions throughout her scenes. Though a smaller role, she ensured the character made an impact and contributed effectively to the production.

Alex Clarke, returning to the society as Sam Fletcher, delivered an authentic and convincing performance. He brought a stern authority to the role that suited the character well, and his dialogue was projected clearly without ever feeling forced. There was a pleasing naturalism in his interactions and a solidity to his stage presence. He was well cast and handled the demands of the role capably. Indeed, this performance suggests he has the potential to tackle even more challenging and substantial roles in future productions.

Jane Newman as Pamela Fulton was, as expected, a commanding presence. She possesses considerable vocal ability and uses it to excellent effect, but what stands out equally is her reactive acting – her ability to listen and respond truthfully in the moment. Her mannerisms and characterisation were beautifully observed, and she brought passionate energy to every scene. There was, beneath her stern exterior, an almost obdurate resistance that added an intriguing hardness to the character and heightened the dramatic tension. There is an intensity and emotional depth in her work that draws the eye instinctively. Her attention to posture and physical presence only strengthened the performance further. Whenever she was in the spotlight, she commanded it completely.

Ade Gooding, portraying Bob Marriott, brought inquisitiveness and warmth to the role. His delivery was well timed and articulate, and he maintained concentration throughout. He made the character relatable and believable, bringing him fully to life with a quietly confident performance. There was a pleasing consistency in his work and an ease in his dialogue delivery that served the production well.

Stephen Moss, as Sir Charles Cresswell, gave another solid performance and demonstrated once again his developing skill as an actor. His upper-class accent was well sustained throughout and added credibility to the character. Lines were delivered with intention, supported by clear diction, good pace and well-judged timing. His physical characterisation was also thoughtful, though one small note for refinement would be to remain aware of hand placement by avoiding putting hands into pockets where possible, as open and intentional hand use can strengthen presence further. Nevertheless, this was a strong and enjoyable performance.

Ashley Foster, making her society debut as Sarah Fulton, also impressed. She brought clarity and confidence to the role, supported by strong projection, expressive facial work and thoughtful body language. Her portrayal captured the innocence and submissive qualities of the character effectively, giving Sarah a delicate, almost angelic quality. It was a promising debut, and one that suggests exciting things to come from her future work with the society.

What particularly stood out in this production was the cast cohesion. In mystery drama, success often lies not just in individual performances but in the cast's collective ability to sustain tension and serve the narrative. Here, that was achieved. Relationships felt believable, reactions were attentive, and the company worked together to maintain the intricate web of suspicion and intrigue that makes *Cat's Cradle* so compelling.

Direction, by **Jan Taylor**, clearly played a significant role in shaping the success of the piece. There was strong pacing overall, and the production understood the need to allow tension to build without stagnation. Moments of humour were balanced carefully against darker undertones, and scene transitions were smooth. The mystery unfolded clearly for the audience while retaining its suspense.

Lighting design by **Jan Taylor** provided strong support to the action and mood. There was a pleasing general wash across the stage, while the LED-lit corridor upstage was an especially effective touch, adding depth and helping reinforce moments of suspense. The use of practical lamps to suggest night and day was simple but effective, grounding scenes naturally and

enhancing atmosphere without overcomplication. The lighting design served the production well and supported the tension inherent in the script.

Sound design featured well-sourced effects and, though relatively simple in execution, was effective and appropriate to the piece. In a mystery thriller, sound cues can be crucial in punctuating suspense and shaping audience response, and this was generally achieved successfully. There were moments when cues perhaps arrived a fraction too quickly, slightly anticipating action rather than accompanying it, but these were minor and did little to detract from the overall impact.

Producing a classic thriller can be a challenge; too much melodrama can tip it into parody, while underplaying risks draining it of excitement. This production found a pleasing balance, treating the material seriously while allowing character and story to shine. It respected the genre while making the most of its theatrical opportunities.

Overall, this was a well-realised and highly enjoyable production that showcased strong work both on and off stage. From the detailed set and stylish costumes to the effective technical elements and committed performances, much care had gone into bringing Leslie Sands' mystery to life. It was encouraging to see established performers continuing to grow, returning members making strong contributions, and debut performers acquitting themselves so well.

A huge thank you to the society and to **Steve Smith** for his warm hospitality. Congratulations to cast, crew and production team on a successful and engaging presentation of Cat's Cradle and I look forward to seeing your final production of the season and celebrating together at our awards event on 3rd October.

PHOTOGRAPHS







PROGRAMME

