

Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne

Rating: 5 stars out of 5

by Tony Flood

David Callister's hilarious portrayal of Sergeant Pratt in *Dong Ding Murder Me On High!* must rate as the funniest bumbling copper since Peter Sellers' inept Inspector Clouseau in *The Pink Panther*.

Yes, Callister is that good! His stream of malapropisms and ridiculous antics had the Devonshire Park audience hooting with laughter throughout Thursday's first night. Peter Gordon's superb script and Patric Kearns' shrewd direction are other key factors in this excellent talking *Scarlet* production of the prequel to the Pratt trilogy. Pratt, whose subsequent promotion to Inspector is the result of an admin error, tackles his first murder case in a side-splitting spoof of an Agatha Christie whodunnit, set in the 1930s.

He almost shoots the daughter of Sir Walton Gates while providing Christmas Eve entertainment on a fund-raising mission at a family get-together in a country house. It is then discovered that someone tampered with his gun, replacing a blank with a real bullet. Jeffrey Holland (*Hi-de-Hi!*), as the eccentric Sir Walton, and Polly Smith, as Constable Potter, who prevents the incompetent Pratt making a series of blunders, also excel with comedic brilliance.

Local actresses Anna Brecon (*Emmerdale*), Carly Day and Natasha Gray (*Emmerdale*), together with Mark Little (*Neighbours*) and Oliver Mellor (*Coronation Street*), complete a very talented cast.

But Callister deservedly takes the limelight, with his clever slips of the tongue, including such gems as trying to tell his nightie-clad wife on the phone that she's erotic but blurting out "you must look very erratic".