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Cinderella

Andrew Pollard

Salisbury Playhouse Production

Salisbury Playhouse

2 December 2015–9 January 2016

This set. It could be a kind of metaphor for producing a perfect pantomime, because what does that largely depend on? You've got it. Timing.

So we may have bare trees in a wintry landscape and, later, interiors of a palace and a kitchen, but in every scene there is an ever-present clock mechanism surrounding the acting space, not only as a poignant reminder of Cinderella's now-dead inventor father, but also, perhaps, to remind us how crucial is time to this particular story.

I mean, if she'd delayed just a moment more... well, it doesn't bear thinking about, does it?

We start off with a long list of cheery admonitions to the audience and this sets the atmosphere for what is to follow. The audience itself becomes part of the action, not just in the normal way of pantomime but, at every possible opportunity, happily standing for the odd chorus and clapping along whenever it seems appropriate, not necessarily as directed by members of the cast. It makes for a very happy atmosphere.

Ah yes, the cast. The ugly sisters, Mylie and Kylie, conventionally vain, acquisitive and stupid, are played with splendid arrogance and impressive volume by Andrew Ashford and Michael Cahill, while the sinister baroness, Cinderella's stepmother (Jemma Churchill), in her funereally long frock-coat and strangely conical headdress, chills the blood. Is there nothing she won't stoop to? Even locking Cinderella in a heavy oak chest in order to avoid the prince finding her?

Okay, this is *Cinderella*, but writer Andrew Pollard and director Ryan McBride have come up with some innovative variations on the traditional story. Cinderella doesn't meet Prince Charming for the first time at the ball, but in the forest where she is collecting firewood. Instead of a golden coach, her journey to the ball is by means of a gigantic swan and Cinderella's only friend, Buttons (Patrick George), in her lonely life at Baron Hardup's castle, has a charismatic friend in the form of Quackers, a rather jolly duck. We love them both.

Ah yes, Cinderella (Elaine Glover). What a sweetie! From the start she engages with the audience, drawing them into her world and eliciting all their sympathy. There isn't a little girl in the theatre who isn't there with her, wishing her well. And that transformation scene at the end of the first half—one minute she's there in her workaday apron and dress, then a moment later, with the help of some of the Red Slippers, she's dressed and ready for the ball. How did she manage it?

Red Slippers? Along with their friends the Blue Buttons, they make up the chorus of talented and energetic young performers from local dance schools (a bit different from the occasion some years ago when the ballroom scene consisted of just four couples).

Then there's the other male pair, of course, Prince Charming (Alex Hammond) and Dandini (Leon Scott), his ultra-continental servant, heroically controlling his rather wayward moustache and clutching a toilet roll, further manipulation of the traditional plot making them alternately master and servant. Prince Charming is everything a prince should be, tall, handsome, dignified and, of course, hopelessly in love with Cinderella, while Dandini delights the audience with his joyous silliness.

Glyn Kerslake is the musical director, with percussionist James Gilbert and bass player Christopher Talman. Music is a particularly important component of the pantomime and it seems only right that the trio should actually be onstage.

So many wonderful things about this panto, the wit (threats to exile Buttons to Basingstoke, references to 'decapitated coffee') is constant. No one—not even the little ones, and there are some very little ones—falls asleep.

Ah yes, you're thinking, but what about the fairy godmother? Of course there's a fairy godmother. With her warm Caribbean accent, Gbemisola Ikumelo is everyone's confidante and best friend.

When we leave the Playhouse and go out into the cold December night, not only will we all have many delightful memories, but we will, for a while at least, carry her sunshine with us.

Reviewer: [Anne Hill](#)