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Grimms' Fairy Tales

Ant Stones

Guildford Shakespeare Company

The Mirror Tent, Challengers' Field, Stoke Park, Guildford

11–30 October 2016

Five actors playing forty different characters and presenting their show in a tent erected in the middle of a field sounds a crazy concept doesn't it? Well it's all done with mirrors and this is the Guildford Shakespeare Company, always full of new and innovative ideas to provide quality and exciting entertainment whether it be Shakespeare, Lewis Carol or, in this case, *Grimms' Fairy Tales*.

The tent in question is no ordinary canvas affair, but a specially imported amazing circular Magic Mirror Tent or, in other words a Spiegeltent, with wooden booth seating and stained glass windows. These were originally created as mobile dance halls in the early 20th century and, as you can imagine, are huge. Mirrors all around the walls initially reflected candlelight creating a magical atmosphere which is no less magical with specialist electric lighting and perfect for stories which begin "once upon a time". Incidentally and reassuringly considering the time of year, this Spiegeltent is also heated.

The tales are cleverly interwoven and are mostly the well-known ones of *Little Redcap* (*Red Riding Hood*), *The Frog Prince* and *Cinderella* but there are a few unfamiliar ones slipped in too, and it's a lovely idea to have *Hansel and Gretel* constant throughout with the two children either acting out their own story or watching, relating or taking part in others.

The cast address the audience in song, "We're Going on a Journey", beginning with Hansel and Gretel abandoned in the forest to survive alone, and it's in this forest that all the other characters are discovered.

Written and directed by Ant Stones and Charlotte Conquest, the same team as last year's [Alice in Wonderland](#), and there are little quirky details added to each tale. Red's Grandmother, it seems, likes a bottle of rum in her basket along with her cakes, and when it comes to Rapunzel, her knight in shining armour is on work experience, going to knight school and planning a gap year in France. It all sounds very "pantomime", but it's much cleverer than that and as fascinating for adults as it is for children.

There is humour inserted in almost every tale, although one or two are a bit scary, and goodness knows what is going on under the circular raised stage which seems to have its own magic producing props out of thin air. A silver fox conjures up whole meals for a starving "Two Eyes", the Wicked Witch meets her end in an amazingly spectacular fashion, and a frog appears from a deep well, while the Big Bad Wolf "eating" Grandma and Red is very cleverly achieved, as is their rescue with the help of a woodman's axe.

This young and energetic cast—Charlotte James, Andy Owens, Dominic Rye, Rosie Strobel and Amelia Zadarnowska—work their socks off switching costumes and characters, as well as whisking props on and off, all performed with evident enjoyment and at such amazing speed that it all seems like magic. I think one or two might ease up on the evil laughter though before they get sore throats.

Beautiful music and songs, composed by Tom Jack Merivale, add to the enchantment and finally Hansel and Gretel's parents come to find them with the words "let's go home", bringing the show to a close with a happy ending and the satisfying feeling that Grimms' fairy tales are not always so very grim after all. Exquisite!

Reviewer: [Sheila Connor](#)