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Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood

Kenneth Alan Taylor

Nottingham Playhouse

30 November 2012–19 January 2013

In his programme note for *Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood*, Kenneth Alan Taylor writes that when penning this year's pantomime, his 29th for the Nottingham Playhouse, he "got the great urge to be back on stage performing." With Alan Taylor making a glorious return to the Playhouse stage, audiences are treated to one of the UK's leading pantomime practitioners and a lesson in the art of pantomime.

Alan Taylor is one of the most experienced practitioners in the country and it shows. In every aspect of his production, *Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood* shines. Pantomime at the Playhouse is never something thrown on each festive season with the hope of getting a few laughs, but planned over a year in advance to deliver the most spectacular production possible.

Alan Taylor's script proves the tale of *Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood* can make a successful pantomime and his version excels where it outlines how Robin Hood came to be outlawed and does not focus solely on Nottingham's most famous resident. As the title suggests, the Babes are an integral part of the narrative and allow for strong plotting.

When the Sheriff of Nottingham realises he will inherit his brother's fortune should the Babes die, he hatches an evil plan to get rid of them and, as a self-proclaimed child hater, enlists the help of his old nanny Nurse Nelly Noggins to look after them at the Castle.

With Alan Taylor as this year's damsel in a dress, Nottingham regular John Elkington takes on the role of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Elkington's Sheriff is cruel yet comedic and what makes the Playhouse panto even more enjoyable is its sense of shared community; not only in the sense of performers returning year after year, but that the audience is involved from the off and Elkington's ad-libs and repartee with audience members young and old is second to none.

Of course, Elkington has learned from the best and Alan Taylor's grand reveal as Nelly à la *Hello Dolly* is a pure moment of theatricality. The two have wonderful stage chemistry together and in their outstandingly beautiful surroundings designed by Tim Meacock they ensure the show is still fresh way into the run with plenty of playfulness occurring throughout proceedings.

But pantomime is not all about slapstick and sparkle. Contrast is an important factor and for a pantomime to touch its audience they must believe in and care for the characters. When Anthony Hoggard's superbly portrayed idiotic tax collector Arnold attempts to murder the Babes and is confronted by Nurse Nelly, the whole audience sits in silence. The confrontation is played for real and Nelly's shock, the Babes' fear and Arnold's regret palpable. This makes Nurse Nelly's 'Not While I'm Around' an incredibly touching piece of theatre, which makes the comedy in proceeding and subsequent scenes appear even funnier as rabbits help make a pie and poor Will Scarlett,

played by Playhouse newcomer Tim Frater, continually draws the short straw in the Merry Men and Women's many disguises.

In the title role, Adam Barlow is a gallant Robin, his heroic actions easily winning the heart of Nottingham Castle maid Marian played by Danielle Corlass. Together with Frater's streetwise Will Scarlett, Hannah Whittingham's Milly Miller and Rebecca Little's Tilly Tuck the Tomboy, the Merry Men and Women are a joyous bunch, each blessed with a fine singing voice as they seek to topple the Sheriff and his dastardly regime.

Next year the Nottingham Playhouse celebrates its 50th anniversary and 30th pantomime with Kenneth Alan Taylor at the helm. Having brought decades of pantomime joy to many, long may this continue.

Reviewer: [Simon Sladen](#)