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Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Alan McHugh and Michael Harrison with additional material by David McGillivray, Paul Zerdin and Matt Slack

Qdos Entertainment

Birmingham Hippodrome

19 December 2013–2 February 2014

Birmingham audiences have had to wait over a decade to see *Snow White* upon their stage, but, as the old adage goes, good things come to those who wait and thirteen seasons after Lily Savage launched her *Wicked Queen* at the Hippodrome, Qdos Entertainment has delivered yet another stunning pantomime at their flagship venue.

Inheriting the pantomime crown from the London Palladium, the Birmingham Hippodrome's pantomimes have always been a glitzy affair, but this year the production exceeds expectations, borrowing heavily from pantomime's music hall and variety roots and bringing the genre up to date with contemporary stars and music, as well as the latest in cutting edge stage technology.

Whereas previous years have focused on two star names, this year's production boasts a whole cast of talented performers which gives *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* a greater ensemble feel and allows for the narrative to be shared equally amongst characters.

In his pantomime debut, Gok Wan is a natural whose zest for life is infectious as he flies across the stage encapsulated in a glitter encrusted mirror. Good casting always enables the star to perform through their onscreen persona and Wan's Man in the Mirror fully embraces this as he offers fashion and style advice to the second most fairest in the Land.

Stephanie Beacham's Queen Sadista is pure evil fresh from the Victorian melodrama as her venomous cackle and icy tones show not only her hatred for Snow White, but also for the audience who greet her with ear piercing boos every time she appears.

Having played Comic in many a pantomime, Gary Wilmot's Da(me)but as Mrs Nora Crumble continues the legacy of 19th century pantomime with a music hall inspired approach to the role and a glorious opening spot musical number about Nora's beloved 'Brummie Balti'. Wilmot's Dame is bright and cheery and amongst all the jollity, there is also great depth to the character, none more so than in musical number 'Because You Love Them' where Nora's tender tune has the audience enthralled.

In Alan McHugh and Michael Harrison's re-telling of the tale, both Muddles and Oddjob, the Dame's sons, love Snow White, which allows for double the fun as the brothers attempt to profess their admiration. Matt Slack's zany Oddjob has the audiences in stitches from start to finish with his series of comedy faces, funny walks and impeccable comic timing. His hugely expressive and energetic performance works well against Paul Zerdin's Muddles, whose masterful ventriloquism demonstrates the real skill of the craft.

With so many experienced and talented performers in the cast, the show does at times feel like the Royal Variety Show of Pantomime as Zerdin's ventriloquism act is peppered throughout the evening, and front cloth staples such as "If I were not upon this stage", which in this version has the energetic chaos of the "Twelve Days of Christmas", are fully embraced. Although this stalls proceedings, it does increase the production's comedy and slapstick quota and ensures *Snow White* remains firmly in the realm of pantomime rather than a slightly festive fairytale musical.

As the one-time childhood sweethearts Snow White and Prince John, Danielle Hope and John Partridge bring two of musical theatre's strongest vocal talents to the stage and by a slight tweaking of the plot, McHugh and Harrison successfully turn the romance narrative into a strong quest as Prince John offers a reward to anyone who can find Snow White after she was abandoned in the forest by a hypnotised Oddjob, who can recount nothing of the ordeal.

McHugh and Harrison's sense of quest is further heightened by the fact that Queen Sadista is also keen to find the whereabouts of Snow White. Rather than merely hoping to stumble across her by chance, Sadista enlists the services of a fire-breathing dragon, who flies over the audience and locates the Princess deep in the forest. When the lovable Brummie beast refuses to scorch down the cottage on grounds of health and safety, the outraged Sadista begins her own transformation in a truly atmospheric scene which results in another glorious flying sequence.

With the quest such a vital aspect of the show's narrative, the seven dwarfs, actors costumed à la Lord Farquaad in [Shrek the Musical](#), play a somewhat diminished role, but nevertheless bring a cheery presence to the production which bursts with life and energy from curtain up to curtain down.

Full of fairytale magic and bursting with spectacle, stars and comedy, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is the Hippodrome's biggest and best pantomime to date.

Reviewer: [Simon Sladen](#)