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The Hunting of the Snark

Written by Annabel Wigoder with music and lyrics by Gareth Cooper

RGM Productions and Alice House Theatre in association with Moya Productions

Vaudeville Theatre

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This is not a dramatisation of Lewis Carroll's celebrated nonsense poem but a retelling aimed at children aged about four and upwards. It is a new script loosely based on the original voyage and Snark hunt that features a few of its characters, quotes a handful of Carroll's lines and has an added child participant to provide audience identification.

It is presented as the tale of a boy whose father, a banker, sets up a Snark hunt. There have been several Snark sightings: a couple from Birmingham and others on holiday all claim to have seen one. There is a growing Snark fever fuelled by the media. Dad plans to catch one and cash in on it.

He commissions a ship and assembles a crew: a captain, the Bellman (whose equipment includes a Snark finder), a baker, a butcher and a beaver who spends all his spare time knitting (not Carroll's lace-making) and on an instant produces a beautiful beanie hat for the Bellman. Dad says his son can't come with them so the boy decides to stow away.

They all sail to Snark Island where they encounter the colourful Jubjub bird (which narrowly escapes becoming dinner), the mysterious Bandersnatch (which kidnaps the Boy to add to his curio collection) and of course the Snark. The butcher seems always to be on a meat hunt and has her eyes on the beaver; the cook may be the same guy as the captain. There are only five actors but many more characters, even though large chunks of the story are missing, including a whole judge and jury.

Also missing are Carroll's rhymed repetitions, surprising because children love repeat phrases, but his clever wordplay gives place to outbursts of song and even some simple dancing and the whole 75 minutes is packed with colour and action. It follows Carroll's pattern of inconsequential silliness that still seems to have its own kind of logic and turns the snark hunt into a child-led adventure. Some of the jokes are perhaps outside the very youngest's awareness and words fly by so quickly that it's quite demanding of young attention—it may take the whole of the opening number to get into gear for it—but it holds through its sheer vitality.

Sail-like sheets bearing London silhouettes give a suggestion of being on a boat even though there's a blossoming tree in the middle of them. Justin Nardella's design also offers strange flowers and lights in the trees with a rich purple and pink ruffle of costume and glittery leggings for the Bandersnatch (who gets the rest of the cast as a back-up group), and colour-layered fringed plumage for the Jubjub bird (surely related to Rod Hull's Emu and just as impertinent). Like Carroll's, the actual Boojum is largely left to the imagination, though there are big eyes and sound effects to stir it.

Ben Galpin is a Bellman who knows how to engage his audience, Polly Smith a comically bloodthirsty Butcher, Will Bryant the Baker, who's not sure who he is but it turns out is also the Captain (and if you read your programme that naughty Emu). Simon Turner's Banker learns that money is just paper when it comes to real values in what has now become a moral story as well as exuberant zaniness and Jordan Leigh-Harris in school uniform almost makes you forget that she's not a real boy.

This isn't exactly Carroll's *Hunting of the Snark* but it doesn't really set out to be and provides lots of fun on its own terms. It could make a great introduction to approaching the verbal delights of the real poem.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)