

British Theatre Guide

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The Rocky Horror Show

Richard O'Brien

Howard Panter for Trafalgar Theatre Productions, Mallory Factor for Hill Street Productions and
Rupert Gavin

Leeds Grand Theatre

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Richard O'Brien once described *The Rocky Horror Show* as a “fairy tale”—albeit one drenched in camp, kitsch and high-voltage sexuality. This cheerfully anarchic musical continues to draw from its B-movie roots and sci-fi schlock, as it tells the tale of two wholesome lovebirds—Brad (Connor Carson) and Janet (Lauren Chia)—whose car breaks down in the middle of a storm. In their search for help, they stumble upon a gothic mansion and are swiftly swept into the orbit of the fabulously deranged Dr Frank N Furter (Jason Donovan).

Frank—a self-styled scientist in heels and fishnets—has just created the perfect specimen of manhood: Rocky (Morgan Jackson). O'Brien himself once likened the show's storyline to the Garden of Eden, casting Frank as the seductive serpent who leads Brad and Janet into temptation. And while the premise is intentionally slight, that's very much the point—it's a loving parody of the over-the-top absurdities of 1950s pulp cinema.

The wafer-thin plot is part of the charm, with its deliberate nods to old-school sci-fi. The show opens and closes with Natasha Hoerberigs's usherette, a nod to classic movie-going, and from there, it hurtles headlong into gleeful debauchery. The script is crammed with razor-sharp innuendo and an endless parade of naughty puns that still manage to surprise.

Of course, the music remains one of the show's biggest draws. There's no denying the iconic pull of “Time Warp” and “Sweet Transvestite”, both reprised with full-throttle gusto in the encore. But quieter numbers like “Don't Dream It, Be It” offer surprising emotional texture, a reminder that even the wildest party has its moments of introspection.

First staged in 1973, *Rocky Horror* was groundbreaking for its celebration of queerness and sexual fluidity. Viewed today, some elements may seem dated or even jarring—especially with a lead character who's both sexually predatory and murderously unstable. But approached as a product of its time and a piece of queer theatre history, it still pulses with life and irreverent charm.

Jason Donovan, returning to the role of Frank decades after first playing him, is almost unrecognisable. His performance is a riot—commanding, seductive and laced with a delicious sense of danger. As the Narrator, Nathan Caton plays the perfect straight man (so to speak), deftly volleying back audience heckles with dry wit.

The supporting cast is just as strong. Job Greuter brings a twitchy oddness to Riff Raff, while Natasha Hoerberigs (Magenta) and Jayme-Lee Zanoncelli (Columbia) add to the mayhem with style and bite. Carson and Chia are wonderfully game as Brad and Janet, relishing their characters'

journey from buttoned-up innocence to wide-eyed liberation. Morgan Jackson and Ryan-Carter Wilson round out the cast with solid turns as Frank's genetically engineered playthings.

At just two hours, the show moves at a brisk pace under Christopher Luscombe's sharp direction. And while the whole creative team deserves recognition, Nick Richings's lighting design deserves special mention for its vibrant, electrifying flair.

The Rocky Horror Show may no longer carry the same shock value it once did, but this production proves there's still plenty of pleasure to be found in its defiant weirdness. It remains, gloriously, a musical that refuses to behave.

Reviewer: [James Ballands](#)