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The Sword in the Stone

Peter Rowe

New Wolsey Theatre

New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich

26 November 2015–30 January 2016

"War! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing!" aren't lyrics usually heard at the beginning of a pantomime, but then the New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich's productions aren't just normal pantos.

Under Peter Rowe's Artistic Directorship, the Suffolk venue has become known for its legendary rock 'n' roll interpretations of fairytale classics and 2015 sees it chart into new territory with *The Sword in the Stone*.

With *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones* as popular as ever, Rowe's latest pantomime tells the tale of warring lands, magical wizards and the quest for a King to unite them all. With Merlin as their guide, the audience is taken back in time to Medieval England where an orphaned boy named Sprout's destiny stands before him in the form of a certain sword by the name of Excalibur.

Rowe effortlessly turns the well-known legend into a two-hour pantomime full of musical mayhem. With the first act focusing on training for the tournament to be crowned King, the narrative permits plenty of scope for comic capers in the form of lessons in love, magic and self-defence.

When Sir Cedric Scuttlebutt realises he has no-one to teach his son Kay, ward Guinevere and adopted orphan Sprout the ways of the heart, Dame Bernadette Broadbottom's services are engaged, but not all is as it seems.

Try as she might, Graham Kent's Cooper-esque Broadbottom just can't get Rob Falconer's would-be King Kay to be successful on the seduction front. Whilst Kay has eyes for Guinevere, it is Sprout she longs for and so begins a tale of true love, believable and touching, brought to life by Lucy Well and Sandy Grigelis.

In the role of Guinevere, Wells typifies the 21st century Principal Girl; bold and courageous. It is Guinevere and Broadbottom who defeat a stunning dragon to save the day and it is Guinevere who stands up to wicked Morgana's son Mordred. But in amongst all the fearless feats, there is still time for emotion and Wells's rendition of "Get Here (If You Can)" as Guinevere longs for Sprout is tender and touching complimented by effective lighting and superb orchestration from Richard G Jones and Ben Goddard.

Music plays an integral role in Rowe's rock 'n' roll pantomimes and the talented ensemble sing, dance, act, drum and trumpet their way throughout proceedings as talented quadruple-threats. Returning to the New Wolsey for another season of festive merriment, Steve Simmonds's Mordred is a mix between Joe Pasquale and Uncle Fester whose act two opener with Georgina White's Morgana most certainly puts the fun into "Uptown Funk" and brings the house down with Simmonds's expressive face and swift interchange between contrasting movements and emotions.

Impressive trap work summons sword, stone and sorcerers whilst special effects captivate the audience. A magical production full of toe-tapping hits, *The Sword in the Stone* is a welcome addition to not only the New Wolsey, but to Pantoland's ever growing portfolio of titles.

Reviewer: [Simon Sladen](#)