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Peter Pan storms The White Rock



Peter pan at the White Rock Theatre. Picture copyright Richard Davenport

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When it comes to panto, we know what we like. And so, it seems, do the clever chaps behind this year's White Rock panto, Peter Pan.

While many people acknowledge that the timeless story of the ever-youthful leader of The Lost Boys makes the best yarn on which to hang a panto pun or two, it still takes a peculiar sort of genius to pull it off on stage.

Mercifully, The White Rock has found a treasure chest of talents to bring the house down when the festive fun begins.

Big names help, and the ever - youthful Paul Nicholas creates the right blend of menace and appeal as Captain James Hook. While your six-year-old will wince at what he does to Igglepiggle, he will be laughing his own head off too!

And Hook is supported by a first class crew, most especially a quite brilliant Smee, played by a highly energetic Ben Watson who brings great pace and skill to a vital role. This Smee could hold the audience even as a lone castaway.

Another anchor on stage was little Eliza, again, fresh from TV land, she lit up both the Darling's house and Neverland, much to the delight of my three young co-reviewers.

Of course, Peter, Wendy, John and Michael each bring their skills on board, with George Reeve bringing us a fresh-faced, suitably petulant Peter for us to engage with. Tinkerbell is a half-punk fairy, whose comings and goings are often marked by flashes - on one occasion not of a pyrotechnic nature.

But the biggest reason why this is such a great production, is that everyone has hit the mark - every sound effect, lighting trick, musical passage and line delivered is done with immaculate timing, and the pace of the panto doesn't slack for a moment as a result.

Some of the challenges of the story are carried off very well too. In the scene where Peter takes the Darlings to Neverland ('Second star to the right and straight on 'til morning', in case your satnav is on the blink) we are treated to a quite beautiful flying sequence.

And later, the whole theatre is transformed - for a wonderful moment - into a magical, glittering night sky.

But, of course, the recipe for success also relies on the staple panto routines - all of which are here,

comic songs, some awfully funny puns, some of the stage action coming into the stalls, and plenty of opportunity to shout at the characters.

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The song and dance routines are excellent, filling the stage with colour and energy, and timed to perfection, each tune familiar enough for us to sing along with.

On the matinee we attended, the audience was very enthusiastic and, no doubt, helped the cast in their roles.

So, for the best Christmas fun this year, take the second star to the right and straight on to Peter Pan at the White Rock Theatre

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