

THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

Presented by: Young People's Theatre

Venue: Young People's Theatre, Hamilton (phone 4961 4895)

Season: Daily until Saturday, then Saturdays to November 27

THE four Pevensie children are evacuated from London to a country house in World War II to escape the bombing raids. But the enchanted world they enter through a wardrobe in the house is every bit as perilous.

This musical adaptation by Irita Kutchmy of the novel by C. S. Lewis makes those perils exciting and colourful as the children encounter an edgy faun, a wicked witch, a sinister wolf, a practical pair of beavers, a noble lion and Father Christmas in the land of Narnia. Excellent performances by a large mixed adult-youth cast, strong direction by Barbara Delaney and Wendy Leis, and stunning costumes and sets deliver a show that will appeal to adults as well as to children.

The opening scenes, with tearful parents farewelling children at a railway station and the Pevensie children unenthusiastically exploring the house in which they are billeted, don't prepare the audience for the amazing fantasy landscape that the younger Pevensie sister, Lucy (played by Grace Elkin at the performance I saw; she shares the role with Hannah King and Libby Cherry) finds while playing in a large old wardrobe.

Narnia, she is told by faun Mr Tumnus (Scott Eveleigh; also played by David Gray and Tyce Fitzgerald), has had a permanent icy winter since the White Witch made herself its queen. And while Lucy escapes from Narnia, her younger brother, Edmund (Alex Waye; also Robert Wisener, Jake Nye) subsequently is lured to support the White Witch by her promise that he will be a king. Lucy and the older children, Peter (Luke Jarvis; also Ben Stuart, Liam Ralston) and Susan (Ellen McNeil; also Claudia King, Phoebe Clark) set out to rescue Edmund.

The White Witch (Anna Lambert; also Bianka Lee, Emily Taylor) is a glowing figure and her first song, in which she praises the *Turkish Delight* that she offers to Edmund, is a jolly affair. But the smiles are soon replaced by rants and threats. And the lively jazz rhythms of her subsequent song of self-praise underline the pride she has in her behaviour.

The lion Aslan (Mitchell Bourke; also Harold Phipps), the one opponent she fears, also has a tuneful welcome for the children. There is a humble sincerity, though, to Aslan's song, and his dignity, in a subsequent encounter with the White Witch, is moving.

The White Witch's rabble and Aslan's army are sturdy ensembles. The technical work, including the sets (designed by Wendy Leis), costumes (Barbara Delaney, Jennifer Bell, Vivien Jones), masks (Ross Brown) and lighting (Russell Jones), contribute to the fairy-tale ambience of Narnia.

Ken Longworth

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