

## **HONK!**

**Presented by:** Young People's Theatre

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

**Season:** Daily until Saturday; then each Saturday to November 26

THE animals in this funny, charming and often moving musical adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling* are decidedly human in appearance and behaviour.

That's not surprising because Andersen's story about a bird who is tormented and bullied because he is different to other members of the brood was based on the treatment meted out to the writer in his youth.

The *Honk!* writing team, composer George Stiles and lyricist Anthony Drewe, take the audience with hero Ugly on a year-long journey during which he searches for home and mother and finds himself.

Directors Claire Thomas and Wendy Leis, a strong team of adult and juvenile performers, and the behind-the-scenes crew, make the tale enjoyable for all ages.

The opening, with farm animals awaiting the hatching of duck Ida's eggs, sets the pattern. Ida (played by Claire Thomas at the performance I saw; Fran Hodgson has the role in a second cast) is dressed like a farmer's wife, and her overalls-clad husband Drake (Evan Booth; alternating with Chris Maxfield) is all too ready to leave her minding the yellow-playsuited female ducklings while he heads, as Ida notes, to "the local watering hole".

When the last, very large, egg hatches, the bird that emerges is clad in a schoolboy's grey uniform and can only honk while his sisters quack.

Ugly (Callan Purcell; alternate David Barlow) soon accepts an invitation from a black-clad Cat (Chloe Barson; alternate Reuben Ryan) to come for lunch – and spends most of the rest of the tale escaping from the sinister creature.

The musical features a colourful collection of characters, including a squadron of geese dressed like passenger-aircraft crew, a green-suited Bullfrog, and a television news team, headed by To-day To-flight reporter Jay Bird.

The songs are a splendid collection. Ugly reflects on being *Different*, the Cat jollily advises Ugly that *You Can Play with Your Food*, Ida wistfully thinks about *Every Tear a Mother Cries*, the birds that rescue Ugly from the Cat deliver an exuberant *The Wild Goose Chase*, Ugly voices a gentle love song, *Now I've Seen You*, after seeing beautiful young white swan Penny, and the laidback Bullfrog (Ben Allsop; alternate Heath Anderson) delivers, in *Warts and All*, a swinging message to Ugly about romance that had the audience clapping along in time with it at the opening performance.

**Ken Longworth**

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