MARY POPPINS

Thursday 18th August 2016

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth.

My name is Sylvia and I am your audio describer for Act 1, which last for 80 minutes, after a twenty minute interval my colleague Pam will describe Act 2.

This spectacular musical, Mary Poppins, is based on the stories of P.L.Travers and the Disney film.

Co-created by Cameron Mackintosh with Thomas Schumacher of Disney Theatrical Group. Directed by Richard Eyre and Mathew Bourne as co- director and choreographer.

Mary Poppins is the story of a young woman who arrives, apparently from nowhere, and proceeds to impose upon a chaotic household her own spit spot, no-nonsense ideas of order. Having achieved this, and in the process introduced the children to a world of magic, she takes off again, apparently for nowhere, by means of a parrot-headed umbrella.

The action takes place in and around the Banks’ household at No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane somewhere in London at the turn of the last century.

As there is a cast of over forty actors, I will only describe, in detail, the ten principle characters and their costumes.

MR BANKS, known as GEORGE, is very much the master of his household. He’s a tall, good-looking man in his early forties with dark hair. When going to work at a city bank George wears a formal dark morning coat with pin stripped trousers, black waistcoat over a white shirt with a stiff wing-collar and black spotted tie. His black lace-up shoes are highly polished.

George is an exacting man, although kindly and well meaning, strides about the house issuing commands and berating his timid wife. Before leaving the house, he stands in the hall shouting for his coat, umbrella, hat and briefcase, while everyone runs around trying to find them.

MRS BANKS, known as WINIFRED, is George’s wife, a comely woman with masses of wavy blond hair swept back from her face into a loose bun. She appears somewhat uncertain in her role as mistress of her exacting husband’s household and rushes nervously about in an attempt to satisfy his demands. She wears a mutton sleeved cream blouse tucked into a waistband of a beige floor length skirt. A matching coat and wide brimmed hat are worn when outdoors.

JANE BANKS is their daughter, aged about ten. When we first meet her she wears a rose pink dress with a white sailor collar, white stockings and button boots; at other times she has on a pinafore over her dress or a coat and bonnet when going to the park. Her long brown hair is pulled back from a fringe and tied with a bow at on top before falling loose down her back. She is a difficult, opinionated child with a bit of a temper who scowls, frowns, stamps her feet and stands with her arms tightly folded across her chest.

MICHAEL BANKS, the eight year old son is a mischievous little boy with a flop of fair hair. He has an innocent fresh face. Dressed in a light brown knitted sleeveless jumper, over a white shirt with a red tie. Brown corduroy knee breeches, long socks and polished short brown boots. Outdoors he wears a brown corduroy jacket and a cap like Bert’s.

BERT is a friend of Mary Poppins .He is a cheerful character who works as a chimney sweep, pushes a barrel organ and paints pictures, which he hangs on the park railings. Usually dressed in brown checked tweed trousers, a multi coloured patchwork waistcoat beneath a brown velvet jacket, a yellow neckerchief tucked into his open shirt and a brown velvet ‘bakers boy’ cap, covering his thick dark hair. When sweeping chimneys he wears black with a red kerchief around his neck and a flat cap. He is young, energetic, with a broad cheeky grin and a twinkle in his eye.

MARY POPPINS is the enigmatic, plain speaking nanny who arrives unannounced at No 17. Although Mary Poppins permits neither disorder nor disharmony in her nursery she is a gentle disciplinarian. She uses her sparkling fairy dust to whisk the children into a world of fantasy and misrule presided over by her mystical friends. The inscrutable Poppins is young, with a neat figure and a wide-eyed, pretty face with rosy cheeks. Her thick dark hair, with a centre parting, is softly drawn up into a bun. When we first meet her she is wearing a black coat tightly fitted at the waist over a full ankle length skirt. Perched on her head is a black boater hat, the brim trimmed with red cherries. She holds a black parrot handled umbrella in one hand and a large red carpet bag in the other. She removes her coat to reveal a blue and white striped blouse, with muffin sleeves narrowing at the cuffs, tucked into the tiny waistband of a bright blue ankle length skirt. She has a small scarlet bow at the throat; her stockings are black as are her boots and she wears white lace gloves.

MRS BRILL is cook / housekeeper to the Banks. A robust older woman with a pleasant round rosy face and greying hair tucked under a white mop cap, she bustles about dressed in a grey, high necked check blouse, a long black skirt with a white apron covering her ample curves.

ROBERTSON Ay is a young man servant in the household. In spite of being eager to please, he is bossed about by Mrs Brill and gets in a panic when shouted at by Mr. Bank. His uniform is a white shirt with horizontal striped sleeves; a green waistcoat, black tie, black trousers and boots. His short brown hair is parted in the middle.

MISS LARK is a smartly dressed, flirtatious older woman dressed in an ankle length black dress and black poke bonnet. She is frequently to be found out walking with her dog, Willoughby.

ADMIRAL BOOM is a grey haired old gentleman, who still wears his naval uniform and wanders about carrying a telescope through which he watches for changes in the weather.

Due to the seamless shifting from one scene to the next and the speed of the dialogue, I am going to include a brief summary of what takes place in the different scenes as there will be little time to describe during the performance.

Most of the action takes place in and around the Bank’s house at No 17 Cherry Tree Lane. From the outside it resembles a dolls house. It’s a three story town house with a central front door and windows on either side except for the third floor, which has an arched dormer window under the tiled roof – this is the children’s nursery. The street and outside of the house are etched in grey and white. In order to go inside, the house slides forwards and divides in the middle, opening up and unfolding on either side to reveal the interior rooms of the first two floors. In the centre, facing us, is the hall with a staircase leading up to a landing with a long widow half covered by net curtains, to the right of which is another staircase leading up to the nursery.

A panelled door under the landing leads to the back of the house. Over the door is a ledge on which stands a tall blue and white vase. At the foot of the stairs stands a grandfather clock next to it an umbrella stand alongside a chest with small pictures hanging above. On the right of the hall is the sitting room and Mr Banks’ study is on the left. This is where Mr Bank often sits at a desk reading documents or writing letters. The drawing room is Mrs. Banks’ domain. In front of the fireplace is an armchair, footstool and small table with a lamp.

At the top of the house, under the eaves, is the nursery. This bright room has a large window on the left; the walls are papered in a blue and white design with a blue frieze of cut out dolls holding hands running along the top and a deep alphabet frieze along the floor line. Two small brass beds face us. To left, on the floor, a dolls house next to the fireplace, a table under the window and pictures hang on the wall. Dolls, teddy bears, tin soldiers and many other toys litter the shelves.

When Mary Poppins takes the children to the park, it at first seems rather dull and dreary with a backdrop of leafless trees behind ornate black iron railings with people dressed in black and grey. They find Bert painting a very different picture of the park. Three of his paintings hang on the railings, his cap on the ground while he continues to paint his version of the park. It is of a bright cheerful garden bathed in yellow sunlight with a long tree lined vista and abundant flowerbeds exploding with blooms of every colour of the rainbow. As they enter the park it magically changes into the fantasy of Bert’s painting. Now everyone’s wearing bright colours; Mary Poppins in pink and Bert in purple. Miss Larks dog turns green; the statues come alive and jump down from their plinths and dance.

The kitchen has a large fireplace facing us with a range. On either side are shelves displaying blue and white crockery and in the middle is a long table covered with mixing bowls and ingredients.

(In the kitchen scene, Mrs Brill is preparing tea. She leaves Robertson ay alone with Jane and Michael. As they attempt to make icing, the three of them manage to destroy the kitchen. A jet of steam gushes from a tap, shelves fall down, and the legs of the wooden table collapse sending everything on the top sliding to the floor…result….chaos!)

THE BANK

This institution is represented by a sombre black, white and grey backdrop of an open hall dominated by white pillars etched with images of bank clerks perched at high desks.

A huge clock on the facing wall is suspended above imposing double doors - a glass dome towers above the marble floor. The serious faced bank staff dressed in black suits, grey coats, top hats and the secretaries in white blouses and grey skirts.

THE TALKING SWEET SHOP

Later Mary transports the children to a magical sweet shop, which appears in the park. A huge bright red and orange canopy unfurls above an illuminated sign saying ‘Corry’, Shop counters laden with all manner of sweets and confectionary appear and the shop fills with colourfully dressed excited customers.

TOYS COMING ALIVE

In the nursery, when Jane and Michael loose their tempers, Mary snaps her fingers and they fall asleep. The toys come alive and take over the nursery. The children wake up and are frightened by the life size toys. Mary’s fairy dust restores peace as the toys return to the shelves.

Many of the scenes melt seamlessly from one to another sometimes with no break in the dialogue. In order to keep you abreast of what is happening I will interject when necessary. I will endeavour to speak during the refrains or chorus.

Towards the end of the scene in the park, there will be flashes of lightning and thunder, which I will warn you about before they happen.

As the audience take their seats there is a dark midnight blue gauze curtain across the stage. Emblazoned in the centre of this curtain in bold white letters are the words, Mary Poppins. Black silhouettes of hundreds of chimney pots standout and thin columns of smoke curl into the night air. Lower down, many small windows dot the dark landscape with points of yellow light. As the auditorium lights fade to darkness smoke appears out of a solitary chimney pot; this is followed by a flue brush and Bert, who as the scene transposes to outside No. 17, introduces us to the family who come forward into a spotlight. Then, as the lights come up Michael and Jane are being chastised by Katie Nanna for fighting over a kite.

Mary Poppins played by Zizi Strallen

Bert- Matt Lee

Neil Roberts as George

Rebecca Lock his wife Winifred

Wendy Ferguson plays Mrs Brill

Blair Anderson as Robertson ay

Sophie Caton as Miss Lark

Graham Hoadly plays Admiral Boom and Bank Chairman

Jane and Michael Banks – please check the board in the Foyer to see which young cast members are taking on these rolls today.

In addition there are:

Katie Nanna, the departing nanny,

A Policeman,

A Park Keeper,

Neleus a statue in the park, who comes to life

The Chairman of the Bank,

Clients of the Bank - Von Hussler and Northbrook.

A Bird woman, selling seed by St Paul’s Cathedral

Mrs Corry, owner of a sweet shop.

Valentine is a male doll who comes to life.