SHREK

The Musical

Tuesday 20th November 2018 @ 7 pm

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for this gloriously spectacular production of Shrek the Musical, as produced by amongst others, Dreamworks Theatricals, Neal Street Productions and Playful productions, with lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire and music by Jeanie Tesori. The orchestra is under the direction of Colm O'Regan.

The book of 'SHREK', written by William Steig, was first published in 1990.  In 2001 it was released as an animated film by Dreamworks, and won an Oscar. It was followed by three more films and has now become a modern classic fairy tale. In December 2008, Shrek the Musical first opened in Broadway.

The show runs for approximately two hours thirty minutes with a twenty-minute interval. I am Veryan your describer for the first half with my colleague, Gwen describing Act two.

**SYNOPSIS**

Shrek is the story of a swamp-dwelling ogre, who, accompanied by his loyal steed, a wise-cracking donkey, and spurred on by a group of displaced fairy-tale creatures, sets off on a quest to reclaim possession of his land, from the vertically challenged, Lord Farquaard. Only in order to accomplish this, they first have to rescue the beautiful Princess Fiona from imprisonment in a tower guarded by a fire breathing and love-sick dragon.

**THE SETS AND CHARACTERS**

The sets for Shrek the Musical are all based on the pictures you would find in a child’s book. Exaggerated, stereotypical images, and like in a book, everything is flat and one-dimensional. Where there is grass, trees or a wall, it is as though they have been cut out from a big picture book.

The curtains crossing the stage are a rich, verdant green, the edges embellished with thick trailing ropes of leaves like those of a beanstalk. When the curtains open there is a huge book in the centre of the stage - this is about twice the height of a man. The green leather cover is emblazoned with a big green letter ‘S’. The ‘S’ with two stalks protruding out of the top similar to the strange ears of an ogre.

The cover of the book opens to reveal the words, ‘Once upon a time’ printed in a gothic style on the left while the pages on the right have pictures through which the characters pop their heads as they are introduced. Although he remains unseen, the voice we hear narrating the introductions is that of Shrek. Here we get a glimpse of Mama and Papa Ogre, the princess Fiona and the villagers.

The book disappears and replaced by Shrek’s swamp. Here everything is very green – the ground is green, there are clumps of green ferns and thick pendulous green vines twist overhead. In the centre of the swamp stands the door to Shrek’s house. This consists of two thick tree trunks either side of a door made from uneven and roughly hewn planks of wood. Hanging from a nail in the middle of the door is a sign saying, ‘Go Away’. At times during the story, pink and yellow flowers pop out around the doorframe and a huge orange sun appears in the background. In scenes when day moves towards night, the sky turns a deep blue. Later, when Shrek is lost in the swamp, the lighting turns to a dark green and the towering trees become thick, dense and menacing. It is outside his house that we first encounter, **Shrek.**

**SHREK**, is a friendly Ogre who likes to scare people, but not harm them. He has green skin and is built up to be larger than life, standing at about seven feet tall. His head is bald and his face round, with a large nose and chin.  His ears, shaped like small trumpets, stick out like antennae on either side of his head. He wears a knee length light brown robe, made of rough woven fabric, with long sleeves, and a short crocodile-skin waistcoat.  A wide leather belt sits below his large belly, and his chunky legs are clad in red and blue tartan trousers.  Heavy, brown-laced boots complete his outfit.

It is in the swamp that we also meet a host of fairy tale characters, They arrive escorted by an armour-suited guard carrying a sword. The captain of the guard will introduce the characters; these include Pinocchio, a wolf, three pigs, Red Riding Hood, Peter Pan, a witch, Fairy Godmother, Mama, Papa and baby bear, a Sugar Plum and an ugly duckling - all dressed in an array of brightly coloured costumes indicative of who they are.

We then find Shrek in a forest of towering trees where he comes upon more armour-suited guards and an over-talkative **Donkey.**

**DONKEY** is thick set and ass-like in a close-fitting body costume of textured grey-fur-fabric. His thighs and arms are padded with large grey hooves on his hands and feet. The suit is darker grey from the knees down. His hair is black and bushy and a mane made of short black fabric loops runs from his head right down his neck and along his spine, ending in a tail. Two large pale grey ears sit firmly upright on his head.

The story then moves to the torture chamber in Lord Farquaad's castle in Duloc. Here the backdrop appears of a bleak and forbidding room, the walls built from large blocks of grey stone. In the middle of the far wall are heavy double doors, the letter F carved into the wood; these doors are flanked on either side by flaming torches set into wall sconces.

When Donkey and Shrek arrive at Duloc they stop outside the entrance to Farquaad’s castle. The painted backdrop for this is a massive stone built fortress, grey, solid and imposing with two very tall towers on either side, each with a single narrow window at the top. Two slightly smaller, solid columns are to the left and right of a set of heavy wooden doors. Above the doors is a shield emblazoned with the letter ‘f’. Flanking the doors are four neatly clipped green trees. The blue sky above the castle is dotted with fluffy white clouds.

Farquaad is announced as the fortress backdrop lifts away to reveal the inner courtyard and surrounding walls of his castle. To the far left and right are two narrow columns, each with a flag flying from the top. Closer to the centre are two more columns, each with a long banner emblazoned with the letter ‘f’ in gold. These two columns are linked by ramparts the width of the arched entrance door.

**LORD FARQUAAD** is youthful, with shoulder–length thick black hair with a short fringe, dark eyebrows and has a clean-shaven face. Initially he appears to be of small stature, but this is quickly seen as an illusion, as the actor performs in costume on his knees, with a pair of thin short legs attached from his waist down. He wears a blue and red tunic, with diamond shaped panels at the top, and a striped shirt, worn over yellow striped leggings and red leather boots with a blue cuff. The tunic sleeves have yellow and blue slashed panels whilst his hands are encased in blue gauntlets. He has a red and blue circular hat, and a full trailing cloak, also patterned with diamond shapes.  His outfit is adorned all over with glittering beads and sequins that reflect the light as he moves. He also appears in a similar red and gold patterned tunic, with a long matching cloak.

In the castle we will meet **Gingy** the gingerbread man - he is a cut out cookie with expressive blue icing sugar eyebrows, white eyes a movable mouth and with buttons down his front. Despite being a biscuit, Gingy has opinions, which he expresses vocally.

Here we also encounter, **Agnes** a rather ditsy Morris dancer dressed as a court jester in a red and blue outfit embellished with little bells, and the **Duloc Dolls,** a troupe of dancers also dressed in red and blue costumes with bright yellow hair and heavy red clogs.

The story then moves to the tower where Princess Fiona is imprisoned.

**PRINCESS FIONA** is slim and pretty, with a heart–shaped face, wide smile and expressive eyes. Her long red hair is worn in a single thick plait hanging down her back. A small but glittering tiara sits neatly on her head, and a string of diamonds adorns her elegant neck.  She wears a full-length dress made of green velvet with an overall small print. The neckline is scooped, the fitted bodice laced at the front and the sleeves long and narrow. Her shoes are green, with a small heel.

The tower is a classic fairy tale image. A pointed stone turret with a narrow window rises high above the ground. Directly below the turret is a larger room with a wide window leading onto a balcony. -This is where Fiona reads her books and whiles away the time amusing herself with her collection of puppets. The balcony has filigree metal work, with a heart detail in the centre. At first he bright sun-lit sky behind the tower is dotted with fluffy white clouds, but as time passes the sky will change from pink to purple and then to red.

On their journey to find the stronghold of the dragon, Shrek and Donkey walk along together as the background behind them scrolls through the passing scenery. They start out in a dense forest, but are soon strolling through rolling pastures and green fields, before finding themselves in a hot and arid landscape where creatures, some of the exotic, appear overhead.

As our hero's approach the fearsome Dragon’s keep, the atmosphere changes. The sky turns to a fiery red and the light fades to near darkness. Shrek and Donkey then have to face the challenge of crossing a rickety rope bridge suspended over a lake of boiling lava. The narrow bridge with its fraying ropes and rotten wooden slats is just wide enough for one to cross at a time. While they are attempting the crossing, red tinged steam billows up at them from the burning lava below.

When Shrek and Donkey first enter the dragon’s keep it’s dark and confined, but then opens out to reveal four captured knights. The knights have long grey hair and beards and are dressed in rags. They stand upright, their heads and hands locked in tight wooden stocks. The scene is dark and smoky with glimpses of a black and white wall with barred windows high above.  Here Shrek and Donkey meet the beautiful and fearsome female Dragon.

**DRAGON** is a deep pink colour and so enormous that when flying she fills most of the stage. The Dragon's neck is serpent-like; her spiny head topped by small horns and her wide mouth opens to reveal sharp white teeth. She has penetrating yellow eyes with slit pupils and moveable eyelids with long lashes that she flutters in a flirtatious manner. Her huge body has a long ridged tail, short legs with clawed feet, and webbed, bat-like wings. The dragon is a magical puppet made with a light, flexible frame, allowing it to walk, bend and turn as it floats and swoops with wings extended across the stage. The frame is covered by a billowy pinkish-purple silk cloth and covered all over with scales even on its underbelly. The dragon is held aloft on tall rods and operated by four highly skilled puppeteers.

Next, we visit Fiona’s room in the dragon’s keep where the high tower is silhouetted in the background. Her bed is a long wooden box or casket with drawers underneath topped with a thin mattress and a pillow placed on top.

Later, outside the keep, Fiona, Shrek and Donkey are back in the woods where the space becomes more open. To the left and right, angled struts curve out onto the stage, like the trunks of big, green trees. In the background, behind a lattice of creepers, the sky is blue with a huge orange sun in the middle.

Towards the end of the first Act Shrek and Donkey arrive at the foot of rugged mountainous cliffs. Rising behind the cliffs is a massive full moon in a dark sky punctuated with pinpricks of starlight.

I should warn you that there will be smoke effects, strobe lighting and flashing lights during the production.

The remaining CHARACTERS.

Four lead actors play Shrek, Princess Fiona, Lord Farquaad and the Donkey, whilst the large supporting cast of twenty-five actors take on the other roles, including the guards, dancers, and a diverse assortment of characters from traditional fairy tales.

My colleague, Gwen will describe the scenes and characters for act two six minutes before the start of the second half.

**CAST AND CREDITS**

SHREK is played by Steffan Harri

PRINCESS FIONA by Laura Main

LORD FARQUAAD Samuel Holmes

The DONKEY by Marcus Ayton

The remainder of the cast in alphabetical order:-

Pig - Adam Baker

Wolf and Thelonius - Michael Carolan

Pinocchio - Joseph Dockree

Captain of the Guard and Pied Piper - Will Hawksworth

Red Riding Hood - Sarah-Louis Jones

Pig - Reece Kerridge

Dragon and Fairy Godmother - Christina Modestou

Ginge and Sugar Plum Fairy - Jemma Revell

Peter Pan - Sam Stones

Pig - Adam Taylor

Mama Bear - Jennifer Tierney

Baby Bear - Francesca Williams

Witch - Laura Wilson

Papa Bear - Kevin Yates