THE WORST WITCH

Saturday 13th April

@ 2pm

Good afternoon witches young and old and welcome to the Theatres Royal Plymouth for this spellbinding production of Jill Murphy's, The Worst Witch as adapted by Emma Reeves, presented by Kenny Wax Family Entertainment, Novel Theatre and Nica Burns. This Royal and Derngate, Northampton production includes an on-stage band composed of three musicians playing keyboard, drums and bass guitar.

I am Veryan your audio describer for the first half of the show with my colleague, Wendy describing the second Act. The show runs for approximately two hours with a twenty-minute interval.

Twenty years before Harry Potter cornered the market in teenage wizardry, Jill Murphy, age just fifteen had already begun writing The Worst Witch series. These books have since sold over five million copies worldwide and been made into numerous films and TV adaptations.

The stories follow the schooldays and misadventures of an ordinary girl called, Mildred Hubble, who inadvertently finds herself at Miss Cackle’s very unordinary Academy for Witches. Here she creates mayhem and is at the point of leaving when an old enemy of the Academy returns with plans for a terrible revenge that threatens not just the school, but the whole world. This is a tale involving double potions, spell duels and broomstick-borne aerobatics, but, if the stories are new to you, don't worry, because this stage show is a play within a play, the script for the school play having been written by Mildred, which, she, along with a handful of teachers and friends perform - all playing themselves.

**Sets, Characters and Costumes**

As the audience enters the auditorium Simon Daws's flexible and imaginative set is on view. In the center of the dark stage is a large circle of blue light in which stands a solitary tree made entirely from broomsticks - the twiggy ends of the broomsticks form the branches, which catch the eerie light from the circle below. Behind the tree at the back of the stage is a dark blue backdrop studded with gold stars. On either side of the otherwise empty stage, are two prospectus-like posters advertising the Academy, where, interspersed amongst details of the school curriculum are photographs of the pupils taking part in different activities. Whilst hanging overhead is a long banner with the school shield containing a black cat and the words, ' Miss Cackle's Academy for Witches. 15 centuries of witching tradition now seeking applications from diverse backgrounds. Rated fantastical by ofmag in all core subjects including, potions, broomstick skills, charms and curses amongst others.

It is here that we first we meet most of girls - they are all dressed in the Academy's uniform of black gymslip worn over white shirts with black and white striped ties. They have grey tights and lace-up boots and, although not worn at the start they will soon be issued with black cloaks with different colored linings, pointed witches hats and colored sashes to wear around their waists. The colors of the cloak lining and sashes dependent upon which house they are in and can be red, blue, green or yellow.

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The girls are then joined by three of the teachers; Miss Hardbroom and Miss Cackle arrive first.

**Miss Cackle,** the matronly and kindly head of the Academy, wears a dark red calf length loose dress with a matching cardigan - she has shoulder length straight blond hair and wears spectacles. Unlike Miss Hardbroom she is forgiving and sympathetic to Mildred's predicament.

The unforgiving and scary deputy head**, Miss** **Hardbroom**, is tall and thin and very witchy with black hair pulled back into a tight knot on top of her head. She is stern and the forbidding expression on her face seldom softens into anything resembling a smile. She is dressed in a floor-length black dress, tightly fitted with a high neck, long sleeves and, surprisingly, is adorned by a gold locket on a chain around her neck. She is really quite intimidating and opposed to fun of any kind.

The next teacher to arrive is the cheerful and dynamic sports mistress, **Miss Drill.** She bounces in wearing crop-legged black tracksuit with white stripes down the sides and white trainers. She has long blond hair worn in a high ponytail and wears a whistle on a string around her neck.

The lights then come up to reveal the black outline of a steeply sloping mountain with a turreted castle perched crookedly on the peak. A huge full moon rising behind the mountain silhouettes the castle and the surrounding spooky forest of stark and leafless, wind-blown trees.

Next we meet the schoolgirls again, only this time properly when they arrive at school lugging brightly colored wheelie suitcases and carrying pet travelling baskets. When opened the baskets are found to contain the girls familiars - pet kittens - these are glove puppets made from little more than woolen gloves, which come convincingly alive as soon as the girls pull them on.

The principle girls are Mildred, Maud, Enid, Ethel, Drusilla and Fenella.

The blundering yet feisty new girl, **Mildred,** (the worst witch) stands out from the rest of the girls when she first arrives, because she arrives on a scooter and then on account of her different uniform, for unlike the others in their black gymslips, she wears a grey skirt, stripped tights and a red zip-up top with a hood. She is tall with dark hair parted in the middle and plaited into long pigtails. She is clumsy, always tripping over or bumping into things, yet very likeable with an engaging personality, especially when fumbling her way through every task alongside her more witchery adept classmates.

**Maud Spellbody,** Mildred's best friend, is short and chubby withglasses and wears her hair in small bunches. She is warm, friendly and kind hearted as she tries to help Mildred adapt to life at the Academy.

Mildred's second best friend, the very wealthy and streetwise, **Enid Nightshade** turns out to be a naughty practical joker who's likely to get them all into trouble. She is dark skinned with black curly hair and a cheeky smile.

Then there's Mildred’s archenemy and teacher’s pet, the jealous **Ethel Hallow.** She has the fluttering eyelashes, pursed lips and disdainful manner of the school snob when she delivers condescending remarks with an imperious glee as she tries to spoil everyone's fun. She has a short bob, the top clipped back from her pretty face. **Drusilla** is an oriental girl with long dark hair worn in a thick plait, whilst **Fenella,** a talented musician who's frequently found playing bass, has thick blond hair worn in two long bunches.

When the mountainous landscape with the school castle perched on top disappears, it will be replaced by the inside of the Academy. This imaginatively staged set is again minimal and as before the background depicts the night sky, with a large moon set against a dark blue backdrop dotted with gold stars. A simple, inter-connecting network of black tubular poles creates the various departments and classrooms within. The poles at the top of the building form the outline of three lopsided turrets, the one on the left being Mildred's bedroom containing a crooked iron bedframe. Other seemingly haphazardly linked poles form the crooked framework that supports a series of wooden platforms and walkways at differing levels; these are accessed by an open metal staircase on the far right. On ground level beneath the platform on the left, is where the three-piece band plays. On the right is another walkway and many tiers of open shelves holding neat rows of glass jars containing different coloured potions and spell-making ingredients. For the scenes in Miss Cackles study, a small table and two chairs magically appear on the central platform.

When the girls go to the potions room, three long workbenches are wheeled in and placed facing us. Unlike the two other workbenches, he middle one has a row of drawers down one side, whilst on the top of all three are cauldrons, glass jars, safety goggles and racks of test tubes.

In the chanting class we meet another teacher called **Miss Bat,** she is a tall slim old lady dressed all in black with untidy grey hair, and although seemingly doddery she is quite agile and certainly is seen to have a sharp mind. She doubles as one of the musicians, playing piano.

When Miss Cackle is explaining about her evil twin sister, Agatha, she takes Mildred along a long dark corridor hung with portraits - this corridor is created by a line of girls holding picture frames up to their faces and by one holding a picture of Agatha.

Later, trapeze-like swings will be lowered for a flying broomstick contest. This aerial sequence has Maud and Mildred dangling from broomsticks and clinging to a hula-hoop moon, the trapezes move back and forth with the help of their friends on the ground.

In Act two we will also meet Miss Cackle's scheming evil twin, **Agatha,** both played by Polly Lister, but she will be described for you by Wendy in the second half programme notes five minutes before the start of the second half.

There are some very noisy and chaotic scenes so it may be difficult for you to hear us at times, but we will do our best to keep you informed.

As you enter the theatre, you might see some of the students and teachers at Miss Cackle’s Academy for Witches moving around in the auditorium! The students are so excited to be sharing Mildred’s play, and they’d just love to talk to you. Please say hello if you get the chance.

As the lights go down, Miss Hardbroom will gather the students (and several of the staff!) onto the stage. Miss Cackle is here to welcome us all, and explain that Mildred Hubble has written this play herself. Maud, (Mildred’s best friend) has been especially busy, preparing all the props and costume for the show, but all the girls have worked very, very hard to bring Mildred’s play to life. Miss Hardbroom reminds the girls, and us, that there is to be no real magic used in this play - and all cats have been left at the school.

**Cast and Credits**

Mildred Hubble - Danielle Bird

Ethel Hallow - Rosie Abraham

Maud Spellbody - Rebecca Killick

Enid Nightshade - Consuela Rolle

Fenella Feverfew - Meg Morgan

Drusilla - Emma Lau

Teachers

Miss Hardbroom - Rachel Heaton

Miss Cackle and her twin sister, Agatha - Polly Lister

Miss Drill - Megan Leigh Mason

Miss Bat - Molly Grace Cutler

**Creative Team**

Adapter - Emma Reeves

Director - Theresa Heskins

Designer Simon Daw

Composer Luke Potter

Three of the cast multitask as musicians. Molly-Grace Cutler leads the band alongside Megan Leigh Mason, both versatile instrumentalists and singers, with Meg Forgan adding a touch of cool swagger on electric bass. The songs are by Luke Potter