

?Cinderella ? If the Shoe Fits? hits the stage at Theatre Orangeville

By Constance Scrafield

It begins with the overture from the band, namely multi-instrumentalists Nicholas Mustapha and Ryan Avery. A fairy comes on to set the tone and engage us in rhyming verse. He leads us to meet Cinderella in her flowered boots, garden tools and her determined protection of the environment. Ben Skipper is the Fairy, Buttons, and general cajoler to us, the audience.

He brings out all the others, right up to the Evil Stepmother, whom we all booed like crazy. She began immediately to spread her rumours of Cinderella.

Laugh-out-loud fun is the theme for this year's holiday show at Theatre Orangeville with the World Premiere Pantomime, ?Cinderella ? If the Shoe Fits,? on now and running to December 23.

Written by Debbie Collins and David Nairn, this is a rollicking, sing-along, poke-fun-at some of Orangeville's popular figures ? crack jokes with the cast ? not to be missed ? couple of hours of your life while the upbeat tempo is maintained, and there is no misery to take home.

Well, the Evil Stepmother, with Debbie Collins in the role, does all she can to frighten us and cast doubts on Cinderella, who is played by Jillian Cooper. She sings the opening number and sets the bar with her glorious voice as an organic farmer dedicating her life to saving the planet.

She is responsible to the environment! Defender of the land!

When, by chance, she meets the Prince, played by Connor Meek, Cinderella does not know what secrets he hides.

Then, there are Pantos' deep traditions: the Silly Step Sisters, so wonderfully performed by Billy Lake and William Lincoln, who are funny, raucous and all in favour of the Evil Stepmother's plans to sell Cinderella's land for lots and lots of money.

Our tale is set in a town called Greensville, and there are plenty of great references to local personalities, the sponsors ? lots of jokes and barbs. Ms. Collins and Mr. Nairn had fun writing these lines to entertain us, so we were assured. For those living in the area, there is plenty of local appeal in this crack-me-up show.

He told us later that writing the show was ?such a delight for Debbie and me.?

They agonized over whether they should keep in this joke and that but decided, from an outsider's point of view, this is really fun.

There are six cast members: Nicholas Mustapha plays magic with the songs as musical director, but then there is a seventh cast member, which is us, the audience.

We are totally immersed in the fun of the show ? booing, cheering, singing al-gusto and, by George, ad-libbing with the cast. They smash the fourth wall with abandon, and no two shows will be the same ? even by live theatre's standards ? because who knows what an audience member and a Silly Step Sister might say to each other next?

Mr. Mustapha leads us all the way through as many musical genres as you can count in two hours, and the whole show strikes the chord of what people want. The jokes are funny and wrenchingly cornball with this cast and us sharing what Panto is.

At the end of the first act, Nicholas Mustapha treated us to a ?mash-up? of songs for us all to sing. A truly gifted musician, he has been given the chance to spread his wings with this show.

As music director of Theatre Orangeville's Young Company shows during the summers in the last few years, he was partly a teacher and full-time accompanist. However, this is a cast of world-class professionals and a whole different level of musicality that has given Mr. Mustapha's innovative imagination lots of scope. He has clearly embraced that chance, and the terrific results will see most of us humming snippets from the show for the rest of the week.

Candace Jennings, choreographer for Cinderella, toured 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat' with Donny Osmond and so much more. Her dances are clever, capturing the spirit of the show. The six people in the cast are dancers, singers and actors, and the dances are an homage to great dancers of the past. It is a magical convergence, with everything coming together just right.

As for the set, when the audience gasps in approval as the lights come up on the stage, that is praise indeed. Maybe not entirely a surprise coming from the creative duo of Beckie Morris' visions of what could be and Lisa Lahue's endless ability and willingness to make reality of ideas.

They, plus their team of artists, thrill us over and over with their backdrops to the plays. A visual treat even before the first word is spoken, every time.

Chris Malkowski is back to do the lights, and very effective they are, too, in such a complex production.

The amazing Wendi Speck dazzles us yet again with the costumes ? those over-the-top ball gowns and headpieces ? which are just the beginning, and fantastic.

Jory McLean says, 'It is good to be back' as stage manager, and it is good to see him back, in control of such zaniness.

David Nairn is well used to directing all types of plays and musicals. This, though, is his first foray into writing; he calls himself a collaborator and co-creator. Yet, this experience has taught him much he never knew about the feeling of creating a show that will be acted and sung on stage, as he and Ms. Collins 'co-created.'

Kudos and well done to Debbie Collins and David Nairn for this wonderful show. There is every reason to suppose that Panto is here to stay ? for a few years at least ? although Panto does have a way of becoming tradition.

For tickets, go to www.theatreorangeville.com. Call the Box Office ? 519-942-3423 or visit them at 87 Broadway, Town Hall and Opera House.