**“Nativity ! The Musical.”**

**Act 2 Programme notes.**

**2pm performance on Sat. 30th  November 2019.**

Welcome back to the second half of “Nativity ! The Musical .” My name is Wendy and I’ll give you a brief guide to the action, any new characters and new settings found in Act 2. This half has 30 scenes and moves at break neck speed, alternating between St. Bernadette’s Primary School (St. B’s ), the foothills and film studios of Los Angeles and an outdoor performance of St. B’s own musical Nativity production in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral no less ! Act 2 is very loud in places- it also contains flashing lights, dry ice, split stage simultaneous action, flying sequences and periods of complete darkness ! St. B’s show ( a play within a play ) takes up half of this act and builds up towards a grand finale with all the characters on stage. It’s very sparkly, jolly, vibrantly colourful and excessive- you may even need a hanky by the end.......The plot hinges on the fact that Paul Maddens was overheard by Mr. Poppy his TA, telling a big fib to try to impress his old friend, now rival teacher, Gordon Shakespeare. Before you can say “Christmas cracker “ the fib about the filming has spread like wild fire -Paul has become something of a local hero for achieving this coup for a rundown and forgotten area and has been feted by the press and the Mayor of Coventry. Most of all, the children at St. Bernadette’s believe the rumour to be true...it has done wonders for their confidence and the school’s reputation and morale. Paul’s quick fib has mushroomed beyond all expectations...something drastic has to be done in order to save face, credibility...and his job! This is why the desperate Paul Maddens is now on his way to Hollywood with two children from his class, to find Jennifer and beg her to make these pie-in-the-sky dreams actually come true, in true Hollywood fashion. No pressure then........!!! As the interval ends Mr. Poppy carries a little girl wearing a pilot’s peaked cap with a soft toy of an aeroplane stuck on top, across the stage from left to right as if we are winging our way to America and the Hollywood hills. This clever and simple effect is repeated in the opposite direction later in the show to denote flying home again. The large sparkly parcels at either side of the stage are also used imaginatively, throughout the show as is a set of gold, shiny steps. In the Act 2 we switch seamlessly between Coventry and Hollywood several times- the differences in climate, affluence, fiction and reality are constantly and simply emphasised. The Coventry scenes are set in the yellow and blue school hall or at the ruined shell of the Cathedral with its enormous, Gothic style pillars and empty windows, gaunt against the black night sky- everyone is in winter coats or woolly jumpers, hats and scarves. The American backdrop is of emerald green hills covered in glittery, green stars with the Hollywood sign and a bright blue cloudless sky. People are dressed for summery weather. We see this as Paul and the children take a “Stars” tour bus ride to try to find the Independent United Pictures studio where Jennifer works. The passengers wear the tourist uniform of knee shorts, tee shirts, baseball caps, trainers and sunglasses. We briefly meet Marty the tour guide and Jonny the driver in similar garb. The bus is simulated by everyone sitting together on boxes and responding as one as if to the motion of the engine.We meet Jennifer again in the red silk ballgown... a fantasy, since she is normally dressed for work in a variety of simple, flowery, capped-sleeve dresses and high heels. Her boss, Polly Parker, a hard-boiled Cockney-made- good, wears an assortment of chic outfits including a sharp white suit with strappy black killer heels and enormous sunglasses. Her very long hair is yanked back into a severe ponytail. She is invariably being fitted for another smart ensemble, en route to a screening or publicity event. When Paul and the children arrive at the studio they meet an officious security guard dressed in a uniform of a white short-sleeved shirt and black trousers, tie and cap. Mobile costume racks feature heavily in a farcical escape sequence as the St. B’s trio attempt to break into the studio and run from another guard. As well as hiding behind the racks, the children don rubber alien masks as a disguise and Paul ends up in a silver space suit swiftly followed by a full Marilyn Monroe outfit of blonde wig and the famous halter neck dress ! Many costumed extras from the film studio and staff pushing film equipment wander across the stage during these sequences. We also meet Tony, a very camp receptionist, with a blond quiff and an earpiece sat on a swivel chair at an enormous white desk in the shape of a curved Hollywood sign.Later, back at the school, a jetlagged Paul has to confront Mr. Poppy, an irate Mrs. Bevan and finally the children- and pay the consequences for the massive fib and failed trip to America. After dramatic scenes and an argument Paul makes a visit to Oakmoor Prep, to see the ludicrously pompous and melodramatic “Herod- the Rock Opera !“ written, produced and starring Gordon Shakespeare. Gordon is surrounded by frantic children dressed in severe black tunics with red sash belts. He wears an outlandish black and red bat cape, black and gold studded armour and biker boots with a straggly wig and crown...he looks like a member of the rock band “Kiss” in his ridiculous make-up. On seeing this embarrassing spectacle Paul makes a momentous decision- St. Bernadette’s show must go on. And so we move to the ruins of Coventry Cathedral and a cold, outdoor, evening performance- we become part of their audience along with the children’s parents and family.Mr. Poppy resumes his role as an erratic narrator and we see both the onstage and backstage action with many changes of costume. These include silver and gold body suits with star–shaped headdresses, children dressed as dancing, brightly coloured buildings, a child flown in as the Star of Bethlehem, the teachers dressed as the planets as Christmas baubles and not 3 but 5 richly dressed kings who turn into a boy band in white suits...all worthy of the smaltz and excesses of a Hollywood film. After a plummeting Angel Gabriel ( in a silver suit, wings and an enormous black wig), an incontinent dog, a camel puppet with specs like Elton John’s ( as promised ) and some nervous children backstage, there is the sudden arrival of a helicopter and its passengers ( simply done by clever lighting and sound effects from the auditorium ) and a jealous and unhinged Gordon . This outrageous excess finally grinds to a sudden and welcome halt as the stage is plunged into complete darkness and a simpler, candle-lit, magical atmosphere descends. The audience are encouraged to help light the stage with their phones. Happy reunions are made and finally the real meaning of Christmas, love and friendship is revealed. (Told you, you’d need a hanky ! )We hope you enjoyed the show...like a box of assorted chocolates, there was something for everyone’s taste!The next Audio Described show, will be for “The Elves and the Shoemaker” a children’s puppet show in the Drum on Saturday 4th January at 3pm and “We Will Rock You” here in the Lyric , on Thursday 5th January 2020. There are also two Audio Described performances of this year’s pantomime, “Cinderella “. Details for these and other Audio Described shows are available in the current brochure and on the theatre’s website, under “Access”.Thank you for visiting the Theatre Royal, Plymouth. Have a safe journey home.