

## Review: The Gingerbread Man

Walking back into the Theatre Royal Plymouth on Thursday 10th December was a very emotional and welcoming experience. Having driven past and seen no signs of vitality within its walls the last 10 months it was a beautiful moment to see its dressing rooms lit up again and the main foyer bursting with warmth and amazing decorated Christmas trees.

I was on my way to see “The Gingerbread Man” in the Drum theatre and took along my cousin who is 3 (and in my support bubble) and only her second time visiting the theatre.

We were greeted at the door by a very pleasant front of house team who took her time explaining that she was taking our temperatures and even crouched to my little cousin’s height and spoke excitedly with her about the show as she could tell we were all excited to be back.

We were shown the hand sanitiser units and on moving further into the theatre were welcomed by the manager and other front of house members.

The theatre was exceptional in its covid safety procedures, all the staff put us at ease and guided us through to our seats without us ever being near other patrons.

On entering the Drum theatre, we were greeted with a beautifully set stage filled with intriguing suitcases and props that make you wonder how they will fit in with the story that you remember “The gingerbread man” to be.

My 3 year old cousin's face instantly lit up and she was simply so excited about the stage, the props and the theatrical lighting, this only rubbed off on my joy of being back in this wonderful building.

The performance started promptly, with two actors playing many different parts as the story continues. The story is well known but I have never seen it quite like this before.

The actors were at ease bringing characters to life whether it be by a quick costume change, a different side of the stage or by a singing puppet! The costumes were simple

yet very effective, a hat became very quickly identifiable as the man trying to catch a train, a smock the farmer, a black cap, a train guard, or an apron the farmer's wife.

There were real laugh out loud moments like when the farmer's wife makes the gingerbread dough and the ingredients are poured into the mixing bowl and the ingenious way the props on the stage multipurpose into different objects with a little help from a sound effect and your own imagination.

My little cousin was thrilled at the moment the gingerbread man came alive, as were all the other children in the theatre. They all squealed as the parents all gasped!

The atmosphere positively crackled with delight at seeing this.

Once the gingerbread man began his journey, we too were taken on one by the performers who became multiple characters that led us on a tale across the countryside, the big cities and even the high seas. The way the characters were interchanged yet kept their simplicity for the younger audience to follow was seamless and thoughtful towards the parents so they wouldn't be answering questions all the time. It was very easy to follow.

Skilled acrobatics were also prevalent in the show, even my little cousin exclaimed "ooh that was good" when a daring jump was made. The jaw-dropping stunts were amazing!

Some very clever use of the props again gave us a sense of the chase between the gingerbread man and the wily ...terribly sneaky...highly anticipated ... naughty hungry fox! The chase is something not to be missed ... It really is one of the highlights of the show.

The performers encouraged participation from the audience and this allowed the younger ones to let off some excitement in the forms of squeals and a few were given "roles" to play when on the ship scene really made the show special. My cousin was asked to be first mate and with an "Aye Aye captain" she felt part of the show

She has not stopped talking about the show since she has seen it and continues to be thrilled by the live theatre even 5 days after the show.

Starting at £10 for a ticket it is incredibly affordable for a family to enjoy, where they won't be too worried if their child wiggles a bit because everyone is there with their children who may be "wiggling" a bit too.

It felt great to be back, the anticipation of what we are about to see and experience as a family, creating memories together was wonderful.

It truly is a great first show to see as we welcome back the Theatre Royal back into the heart of Plymouth and all of us who love it and have missed it so dearly.

By Dulcie Harrison (TRP Blogger & Critic)