**The Lion , the Witch and the Wardrobe.**

By C.S. Lewis.

Thursday 24th February 2022

Audio description notes for Act One.

Welcome to the Theatre Royal, Plymouth for the matinee performance of the award-winning production of **“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe”** based on the world famous classic children’s book by **C.S.Lewis.**

This outrageously creative and vibrant show is brought to you by Elliott and Harper Productions and Catherine Schreiber and is the amended touring version of the original Leeds Playhouse production. The running time is just over two hours with an interval- it is deemed to be suitable for those aged 6 and above.

My name is Wendy and I shall be audio describing Act 1 of this performance. My colleague Veryan will give notes on Act 2 during the twenty minute interval and then describe the second half. We need to warn you that there will be loud noises, bright lights and flashes, some smoke, violent fight scenes, and some rather scary characters – with quite a large dollop of magic thrown in for good measure! You may already know the story well....there have been some liberties taken with the text and some extra characters added in order to transpose a very complex tale for the stage.

**Themes.**

“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe “is a many layered allegorical fantasy concerned with parallel worlds, the passage of time, faith and Christianity. The effects of war, power and its misuse, the constant battle between good and evil and the search for hope are also considered. These serious themes are addressed through a basic story about the four Pevensie children –they are wrenched from their family by the outbreak of war and have their real world turned upside down. By exploring a parallel magical world they are tested and forced to adapt and grow up. High drama ensues and when trying to rescue family and friends from danger they also discover bravery and loyalty. They meet some kind, talking woodland animals, powerful characters and many mythical creatures – they witness spectacular events in a land where time runs at a much faster rate and almost anything can happen! Quite an adventure then......!

**Production techniques.**

In order to portray these two worlds the production makes great use of puppets, masks, distinct colour palettes, inventive costumes and repeated imagery and props.

The production opens during the gloomy, dark days of the second World War- we start at a London station where children are being evacuated- we proceed to a mansion in the depths of the Scottish countryside by train and then on to the magical world of Narnia.

When we are in the **human world** the mood is set by clever use of sepia and earthy coloured costumes, staging and lighting. When the children finally arrive at Professor Kirk’s house, we see **a huge gilded clock face** suspended above the centre of the stage. It shows the 8 phases of the moon at the centre, surrounded by an outer ring of Roman numerals. However, the clock has no hands, suggesting that time stands still or passes unmeasured. The **wardrobe** is rather grand and mysterious with a similar patina and a huge gilded circular sunburst carved into the wooden doors. The clock and wardrobe are connected as if part of the inner workings of a giant pocket watch- metal circles intersect each other. The lighting is very muted- warm light from globe-shaped lamps often punctures the gloom.

Whenever we are in **Narnia** a huge incomplete circle lights up around the front of the stage- it changes from cold shades of blue to a yellowish white and even bright pink. Smaller light circles appear above the stage-they are often used to frame scenes of simultaneous action in other places. There is a massive cylindrical portal high above the centre of the stage- this has a front disc that moves sideways and eclipse-like, gradually reveals the blue-ish light behind. Characters or musicians are often seen here in silhouette regarding the world below. Sometimes this space looks like the iris and lens of a huge eye. Beneath the portal a large, simple rectangular opening sometimes appears. Muted gold intersecting circles are drawn on the stage floor inside a circle of light. Narrow bars of light stretch across its diameter.

Individual settings are economically suggested by carefully chosen pieces of furniture and props- fabric is also used to great effect. The White Witch’s dress unfurls like a huge, enveloping tent, long white coats or strips of cloth become a swirling snowstorm or a swing and a silk parachute is flown in to make a tent-like house for Mr. Tumnus the faun. Later, bathed in brown light this is transformed into the Beavers’ underground home. Enormous images of monsters are also back-projected onto fabric. The clever use of texture- tweed, wool, fur, battered leather, shiny metal, sequins, wood, silk, crystal etc conveys atmosphere, character and the separate worlds. The subtle use of appropriate sound effects, live music, singing, movement and dance makes this a truly multi-sensory production.

Another layer is added with the use of puppets- the artfully named Schrodinger the ginger cat neatly leads us from short scene to scene; a fabric robin is whirled around by a dancer, drawing the children onwards and the train is very cleverly and imaginatively conveyed. There is even an ingenious pink Turkish Delight monster that lights up and taunts Edmund until he is sick! Veryan will describe Aslan the lion and other puppets, in detail, later.

The large cast are multi-talented and take on many roles, swiftly creating new characters or crowd scenes, playing instruments, singing and dancing in true ensemble fashion, often changing the set too, as if by magic!

This production is directed by Michael Fentiman, the choreographer is Shannelle “Tali “Fergus and the overall designer is Tom Paris. The lighting designer is Jack Knowles and the puppets are designed and directed by Max Humphries and Toby Olie. Together with the performers they create a very rich and detailed experience for the audience.

**Costumes/characters/settings and props- described as we meet them........**

The play opens with a solitary soldier in a rough brown woollen Army uniform, great coat and tin helmet seated at an upright piano playing “We’ll meet again “ in the cold, sepia gloom. An officer and other citizens gradually fill the stage, setting the performance style of the production...they are all dressed in drab earthy coloured 1940s clothing- the women in dresses, woollen coats and hats, the men in uniform or overcoats, tweedy trousers and jackets with scarves, hats or caps and often carrying suitcases and umbrellas. We meet **Miss Chutney** (an extra character not found in the book ) at the railway station, mustering evacuee children- she is in a dark coat with an official arm band and carries a clipboard and a whistle.

**The four Pevensie children** arrive at the last minute, carrying suitcases – they have identity labels and gas mask boxes attached to their dark winter coats emphasising their present evacuee status. **Peter** the eldest and tallest also wears a rust-coloured woollen scarf, grey flannel school trousers, a white shirt and striped tie and a fair isle sleeveless jumper- he is very conscious of being the head of the family now they are separated from their parents. His younger brother, **Edmund** lurks behind and is similarly dressed but his shirt collar is open and he wears a knitted green hat. Edmund is rather sullen, upset and missing home already. He has a large paper bag of sweets in his pocket.

Sensible older sister **Susan** wears a maroon woollen beret, a plaid kilt, ankle socks, a white, short puff- sleeved blouse and dark blue sleeveless jumper. Susan is bookish and rather serious- she is very motherly towards her siblings. Her little sister **Lucy** is short with curly brown hair and a round innocent face. She is both excited by and fearful of this enforced adventure. Lucy wears a white shirt and a pale blue woolly cardigan with a fair isle yoke, tomboyish grey woollen shorts, knee length socks and little red suede shoes. The other children wear sensible leather brogues. Lucy carries a pale blue handkerchief for emergencies. Large, old, heavy fur coats will be worn by all of the children later in the story.

The steam train is cleverly conveyed by a model engine held aloft with the carriages made from suitcases that light up- the cast weave them around the stage to suggest the arduous overnight journey to Scotland.

**Mrs. Macready**, the professor’s stern house keeper collects the children from the Scottish village station. She enters on a tricycle, wearing a green tweed suit, dark woollen stockings and a brown felt hat. Her hair is curly and dark and her gold rimmed glasses glint coldly in the light. She is very unwelcoming and makes it plain that she will brook no nonsense from the children.

**Professor Kirk** is tall, bespectacled and balding with a grey goatee beard. He wears a brown tweed jacket over a white shirt, rust coloured woollen waistcoat, a tie and tan baggy trousers. He carries a large pocket watch and usually has a book in his hand. His gloomy, sepia coloured study in his comfortable, rambling old house is conveyed by a battered leather armchair with a side table, wicker waste paper basket, a fringed standard lamp, and a large chest of drawers with piles of books and an ugly carved head. There is a worn, oriental rug in front of his chair – where his spoiled ginger striped cat, **Schrodinger** ( also not found in the original book ) likes to curl up. Later the imposing dining room is represented by a long wooden table covered with a starched white cloth, five matching chairs, candlesticks, flowers and crockery. **Members of the cast** play maids in long black dresses and full, white frilly aprons and caps- they carry globe lamps to lighten the gloom.

 Whilst exploring their new home from home, the children stumble into a spare bedroom which is empty except for a huge, old wooden wardrobe- the portal to another world, also at war. Hanging up inside are a selection of discarded old clothes and several moth-eaten fur coats......

A solitary, tall, old-fashioned glass and metal, gas-powered street lamp marks the arrival in the magical other world of Narnia. It is a cold, blue and white, snowy land- dancers swirl their long white coats and carry globe –shaped lamps and twirling parasols. Sometimes they freeze like statues as snow gently falls. Blueish light floods the area- not a blade of grass or a green leaf are visible in this icy wasteland.

The next character we meet is **Mr. Tumnus**, the faun. He wears a leather flying jacket and helmet with protruding goat horns, a mustard woolly jumper, a long scarf, brown baggy jodhpurs with suede fringeing on the side seams and leather boots. Extra fringing forms his tail. He wears woollen fingerless mittens, carries a wicker basket and a paper parasol despite the snow! A silk parachute flies in as a tent to convey his house which is sparsely furnished with Utility-style pieces- an armchair, several side tables holding lamps, cake plates, books and a treasured picture of his father. He also has a small brazier with a tea kettle.

When Edmund follows Lucy into the wardrobe he enters **Narnia** and is the first to meet **Jadis** or the **White Witch**, the self-proclaimed **Queen of Narnia**. She is tall, beautiful and very pale with long ash blonde hair. She is dressed in an arctic white silken gown that glistens and billows behind her. The White Witch has a full-length white fur coat with an enormous collar and wide sleeves. Her magic wand is a lethal icicle which she uses to strike creatures or to turn them to stone on the spot. She is a cruel, bullying despot who rules Narnia and is responsible for it being a miserable, frozen desert...always winter and never Christmas. She wears a crystal headdress of large vicious looking icicles and arrives on a machine that resembles a World War 2 gun carriage, pushed by her band of scuttling, scary **Cruels**. These nasty creatures are dressed all in black- woollen jumpers and face coverings, kilts and long socks with goggles and metal military helmets covered in sharp spikes. Sequinned shoulders and shiny buttons suggest a hard outer shell. They crawl and scurry about like glittering beetles, doing their mistress’s bidding. Their leader is the feared **Maugrim**, **the Chief of the Secret Police**. He is dressed in black boots and leather jodhpurs and is wild, sinewy and bare-chested, with long metal stilts for front legs. Maugrim has an angular wolf’s head with a sharp muzzle and vicious teeth- he is dangerous, very agile and threatening.

We also meet a variety of woodland animals who make up the Animal Resistance Army- they bravely work together to save their friends and to oppose the White Witch. They long for the return of Aslan the lion and the final arrival of hope and an end to the eternal winter. **Mr. and Mrs. Beaver** lead this group like the Home Guard. They are similarly dressed in khaki flying suits with dark fur collars, leather helmets and goggles. They both have gold rimmed spectacles and Mr. Beaver sports a waxed military moustache and a pair of binoculars. They both have wicker snow shoes to cleverly suggest their odd shaped tails and wear cross-body leather pouches and map cases. Mr. Beaver communicates in coded language with his colleagues via a field telephone system made from old baked bean tins and string! Their home is sparsely furnished with 4 canvas camp stools and a pot- bellied stove.

The other resistance members wear a clever mixture of corduroy, suede, feathers and textured Aran wool clothing with additional tails, ears or hats to convey their animal status- such as the badger who has a black and white stripy jumper, brush tail and Mohawk hairstyle .

 These characters are played by the following, multi-talented actors :-

 The Pevensie children :-

* Peter Ammar Duffus
* Susan Robyn Sinclair
* Edmund Shaka Kalokah
* Lucy Karise Yansen
* The White Witch/ Jadis/Queen of Narnia Samantha Womack
* Professor Kirk Johnson Willis
* Mr. Tumnus Jez Unwin
* Maugrim Michael Ahomka Lindsay
* Mrs. Beaver Christina Tedders
* Mr. Beaver Sam Buttery
* Aslan Chris Jared

 Other members of the cast play instruments and double up as dancers, crowd scene characters, Cruels, animals and puppet operators.

**A few facts about the book :-**

C.S. Lewis wrote the book after the war and it was published to great acclaim in 1950. It later became the 2nd book in “The Narnia Chronicles “ after he wrote a prequel explaining the back story to the conflict between Aslan and the White Witch, Jadis and how Narnia came to be literally frozen in an eternal winter.

 It is said that Lewis had a vivid mental picture of Tumnus the faun as a possible character in a story when he was a boy, many years before he actually wrote it. During the war, Lewis hosted three evacuees at his house outside Oxford. The book is dedicated to his god-daughter Lucy Barfield and the youngest Pevensie child is named after her. There have been many stage and screen versions of “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe “- they and the book have won many accolades over the last 70 years. Many critical theses have been written especially about the book’s supposed Christian undertones with Aslan as a redemptive Christ figure sacrificing himself for the greater good. It is still a jolly good escapist read of course...... Anyway, we hope you enjoy this wonderfully creative stage version. Are you sitting comfortably........?