

Review: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

By Suzanne Cleave

***The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* at Theatre Royal
Plymouth**

CS Lewis' 1950 novel *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* is a classic tale, passed down from generation to generation.

The magical story of the Pevensie children, who are transported through an old wardrobe to Narnia, a snowy kingdom, where time has stood still and it has been winter for a hundred years.

The tale has been transformed in this new stage adaptation, on tour around the country and at the Theatre Royal Plymouth until February 26.

This was no mean feat for director Michael Fentiman, who himself admitted it is a massive show with many epic moments that need to be addressed to give the story justice.

But the work from the creative team has resulted in a visual journey that spellbinds the audience, young and old.

The show starts off in wartime, with a soldier playing songs on the piano, and the Pevensie children – Peter (Anmar Duffus), Susan (Robyn Sinclair), Edmund (Shaka Kalokoh) and Lucy (Karise Yansen) – waiting at the train station to be evacuated from war-torn London.

The train takes them to Scotland where they are welcomed into the home of Professor Kirk (Johnson Willis), not a fatherly figure but one who offers a structured way of life, and a safe refuge.

Their lives are changed forever when Lucy, and then the siblings one by one, discover, through the musty fur coats at the back of a wardrobe, a portal to the magical world of Narnia.

There, Lucy meets the spritely but dispirited faun Mr Tumnus, who shares his despair that the White Witch has taken control of Narnia and enforced winter on its inhabitants

for 100 years.

Yet despite the state they find themselves in, there is hope. Aslan, the all-powerful King of Beasts, is on the move and there were signs that the thaw had begun, and the seasons were finally changing.

The story plays out between the white, wintery scenes of Narnia, scattered with globes of white light and the dark presence of the White Witch (Samantha Womack) who sent a chill through the air with minimal effort, and her accompanying fearsome beasts.

But, for me, the true magic was found in the woodland scenes, with Mr and Mrs Beaver and the other animals, each with their own characteristics and quirks, all full of merriment!

Along with the dark parts, there are some light-hearted scenes, such as the appearance of Santa, who presents the children with weapons and signals the end of winter.

Brilliant puppetry is used throughout, from the suitcases at the start that transform into the moving train, to Schrodinger the Professor's cat and the robin, a fluttering sign of new beginnings.

But nothing prepares the audience for the appearance of the lion, Aslan – played in two forms, a puppet and an actor. The puppetry is magnificent and alongside Aslan was Chris Jared, who gives Aslan his voice.

It's a story of hope and a production full of visual treats, taking the audience deeper into this extraordinary tale.