

**Review: Gangsta Granny**

**By Su Carroll**

## ***Gangsta Granny* at Theatre Royal Plymouth**

Theatre was always a part of my life growing up – panto with the family at Christmas, summer shows, school plays (I was Toad in *Toad of Toad Hall*), drama groups and a lifetime of sitting in the dark, waiting for the curtain to go up.

Then I was a mum taking my own kids to the theatre which opened up a whole new world of child-orientated entertainment. I could see the same magic they could and the wonder they experienced. And then they grew up. And so I've waited patiently until my grandson, Arthur, was ready to share the fun with me.

Aged five-and-a-half, he came with me to his first panto - *Aladdin* with Joe Pasquale at the Theatre Royal Plymouth last Christmas. It was perfect – toilets that could be ridden across the stage, pooing elephants, weeing dogs, lots of silliness and plenty of farts. He loved it.

So I had great hopes for Birmingham Stage Company's *Gangsta Granny*, based on the hugely popular David Walliams book. Founded 30 years ago, BSC have been creating great theatre for families – many based on the stories that children adore such as Roald Dahl's magical tales and Philip Pullman's enchanting work. *Gangsta Granny* broke records when it premiered and it has all the hallmarks of a classic BSC creation.

There are lots of characters, snazzy costumes and clever sets – buildings swirl and open to reveal Granny's typically cluttered, old-fashioned home and the glitzy, widescreen TV home of her son and his wife and their 11-year-old son Ben.

Every Friday when Ben's parents are indulging their love of ballroom dancing, Ben has to stay with Granny. He hates it. She is soooo boring. And she smells. And she only ever cooks cabbage. And she has no TV, all they ever do is play Scrabble. Ben even pretends to be asleep to avoid the dull bedtime story.

But when he catches Granny sneaking around in a disguise he discovers there is more to her than meets the eye. She is the Black Cat thief and she has a biscuit tin full of stolen jewellery to prove it. Suddenly cabbage soup (and cabbage pie, cabbage curry and cabbage cake) don't seem to boring after all. Maybe Ben and Gansta Granny could pull off an audacious heist together. They could steal the Crown Jewels!

The tale is deftly told, there was little fidgeting and lots of laughter from Arthur and everyone else in the audience. At a little over two hours running time, the story rattles along and there's plenty to keep young ones engaged. There's a moral (the old aren't boring. Phew!), a little sadness, some dancing, funny characters and a royal appearance. Oh, and plenty of farts. Arthur says he loved it. "*But I wouldn't want to eat cabbage soup...*"



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