

Review: Gangsta Granny

By Suzanne Cleave

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

David Walliams' best-selling and much-loved story, *Gangsta Granny*, had a tremendous reception on the opening night at the Theatre Royal Plymouth.

A fantastic introduction to theatre for the younger members of the family, *Gangsta Granny* is full of fun, laughter and high jinks, but with an important message as well.

Gangsta Granny tells the story of Ben (played superbly by Justin Davies), an aspiring plumber, who gets sent to his granny's house every Friday night while his *Strictly Come Dancing* wannabee parents go off to enjoy a night on the dancefloor. Ben dreads these visits to his granny's house. She feeds him cabbage with every meal, asks him the same old questions, makes him play Scrabble and he thinks she's boring. But Ben soon discovers Granny (Isabel Ford) is harbouring a big secret, a very big secret!

It turns out that she is not just any old granny. When Ben finds a stash of jewels hidden in a biscuit tin in her kitchen, he finds out she is an international jewellery thief and it's not long before they are planning her biggest heist yet – to steal the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London! Friday nights will never be the same again.

Luckily Ben's dream of becoming a plumber comes in handy, as an old copy of Plumbing Weekly gives them a layout of the sewers under the city. There's only one thing that may stop them – Granny's next-door neighbour, Mr Parker, who lives up to his name by being the nosiest person in the street. He heard the pair talking and is adamant he will put a stop to their japes!

Mr Parker is one of a number of colourful characters we meet along the way. Jason Furnival, who also plays Dad, is excellent as the annoying neighbour, and brings a lot of fun to the proceedings. There's also Raj the shopkeeper (Irfan Damani), who has a unique way of selling his out-of-date goods, and the dance show presenter Flavio, who makes Ben's mum weak at the knees.

The set is amazing. Three units that look like houses, are each opened up for a different scene, with storage solutions I could only dream of!

There are many poignant scenes including when Granny tells Ben seeing him is the highlight of her week, and later when we learn she waited a couple of days to reach the telephone after she had a fall. It highlights the underpinning message of chronic loneliness in older people. The production itself is dedicated to Rose Zierer, a lady who the adapter and director, Neal Foster, was introduced to through an Age UK befriending scheme.



Gangsta Granny is a heart-warming and fun-packed piece of theatre. If you've already read the book, you won't be disappointed. The Birmingham Stage Company have done a fantastic job of bringing the story to the stage.



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