

Review: Coppélia

By Su Carroll

***Coppélia* at Theatre Royal Plymouth**

Coppélia is often seen as the perfect “starter” ballet for young audiences. It has a simple story, lots of lovely set pieces with solos, duets and stage-filling spectacles and it has a pleasing, hummable score. I have seen several productions that certainly tick all the boxes, but this revival by Birmingham Royal Ballet is quite simply glorious.

It celebrates the work of Sir Peter Wright, who created the original production for the company in 1995 and has just been named Founding Director Laureate of Birmingham Royal Ballet. It is the first of three Wright works that director Carlos Acosta has programmed – The Nutcracker is the second and the final is Swan Lake, which comes to Plymouth next year.

This Coppélia comes to life from the first note of the orchestra, under conductor Paul Murphy. The music before the curtain goes up is often just a scene-setter, a gentle taste of things to come. Not here. The Royal Ballet Sinfonia announce their arrival with great vigour and energy. They are showing us that it's not all about the dance, the score by Delibes is just as important.

By the time the curtain did rise, I was metaphorically rubbing my hands with glee. This was going to be something really wonderful. And I wasn't disappointed.

The story is a charming one. Mad professor Dr Coppélius has created a mechanical doll that he would like to bring to life and places her on the balcony of his workshop. Swanilda (Céline Gittens) sees the chance to make a new friend, but the book-reading Coppélia ignores all her attempts to catch her attention. Swanilda's love, Franz (Tyrone Singleton) seems equally enchanted by Coppélia. But no amount of posturing or prancing will turn her wooden head.

The only answer is for Swanilda to sneak into Coppélius's workshop to find out exactly what's going on - the chance for lots of mechanical dolls to come to life. When Franz arrives, Dr Coppélius sees the chance to cast a spell and bring his doll to life,

BRB's Coppélia is simply marvellous. Céline Gittens' Swanilda is lively and funny, and as Franz Tyrone Singleton is full of flirtatious charm. They make a delightful pairing that sets the tone for the whole piece.

Coppélia may be an introduction to ballet for many, but even those who have seen it several times before will find something magical to thrill them.