**Mary Poppins Programme Notes – Act One Audio Described Performance Saturday 15th March 2025 @ 2:30 pm Audio Describer Denise Reeves**

**Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for the 20th Anniversary of this iconic musical Mary Poppins based on the stories of P.L. Travers and Walt Disney film.**

**With original music and lyrics by Richard M Sherman and Robert B Sherman – the book by Julian Fellowes, new songs and additional music and lyrics by George Stiles and Anthony Drewe, this stage musical is a fusion of various elements from the two, featuring dazzling choreography, incredible effects and unforgettable songs.**

**A full 18 piece live orchestra accompanies this multi-talented company under the direction of Isaac Mccullough.**

**Co-created by Cameron Mackintosh and originally produced for Disney Theatrical Productions by Thomas Schmacher, the show lasts for 2 hours 50 minutes.**

**I am Denise your audio describer for Act One which lasts for One hour 40 minutes followed by a 20 minute interval. My colleague Wendy will then describe Act Two.**

**Please note there are claps of thunder, sounds of wind, rainstorm and barking from Willoughby the dog – an explosion in the kitchen and music from a barrel organ.**

**I will now give you a synopsis of the story together with a description of the set, costumes and main characters.**

**Set in Edwardian London, the story focuses on the Banks family who live at 17 Cherry Tree Lane – George and Winifred banks, their two naughty children Jane and Michael, their cook/maid, Mrs Brill and their house boy Robertson Ay. The children are out of control and the house descends into that of a madhouse, as the latest nanny - Katie Nanna – storms out.**

**The children, having their own ideas of what constitutes the perfect nanny, decide to write their own advertisement for a new one, but their father George tears up the paper and throws it in the fireplace. What follows is the arrival of Mary Poppins whose mystic nanny-like solutions take us all on a magical journey from beginning to end.**

**As the audience take their seats the gauze show curtain is in dark blue. In the centre are the words Mary Poppins in large white letters edged in red. Vertical trails of white smoke waft across the curtain into a dark scudding sky. The night time silhouette of chimney pots and lit windows frame either side of the proscenium down to the stalls.**

**The orchestra plays a medley of songs from the show as darkness descends. It’s Autumn and the wind begins to blow. Through the gauze the rooftops of London is spread out before us. A solitary large chimney stack rises above the landscape as a sweep’s broom emerges from the chimney followed by the head and shoulders of Bert – a charming and cheeky chappy of many professions – who climbs out and sits on the edge of the chimney. As the curtain lifts Bert begins the story through the song Chim Chiminey, introducing the Banks family at Cherry Tree Lane – appearing out of the forest of chimneys with their two children Jane and Michael.**

**The music then segues into the song “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” - as Bert clicks his fingers the characters come to life as Michael and Jane rush around with a makeshift kite pursued by their somewhat agitated nanny, Katie Nanna. Their freedom is short lived when they run into the local Policeman.**

**Bert returns pushing his barrel organ along Cherry tree Lane depicted by a monochrome backdrop of Edwardian houses. He stops in front of No 17 – a large double fronted three storey house with two turrets either side of the eaves and a balustrade balcony.**

**Bert meets Miss Lark coming the other way - a tall slim lady with a coquettish air about her - carrying her barking feisty lap-dog Willoughby. Admiral Boom strolls by carrying his binoculars – a short elderly gentleman of senior years with a beard and an eye for Miss Lark – who warns Bert of dark clouds gathering over No 17.**

**Then as a fanfare sounds, and Bert clicks his fingers, the frontage of No 17 opens out like a dolls house to reveal the inside and the house bursts into life. A staircase winds down from a landing which leads off to the bedrooms – depicted by the drawings of windows on either side – and lit wall lights. The door under the stairs is used as an exit and entrance. Above it is a small shelf with a couple of ornaments and a blue and white china vase. To the left is Mr Banks’ desk with a lamp and chair. To the right of the door is a sideboard, a grandfather clock and an umbrella stand. On the other side of the stairs is a drawing of a large fireplace with mantelshelf above is a lit wall light. In front of the fireplace is a pale mauve velvet chair, matching stool, side table and lamp.**

**Chaos reigns as Katie Nanna storms out and the Banks household is left with a dilemma.**

**With the sound of wind Mary Poppins suddenly appears among them. She wears a buttoned-up black calf length coat, over a blue full skirt and white long sleeved blouse buttoned at the neck. Her dark hair is tied in a neat bun topped by a hat with cherries in the brim, carrying an umbrella with a handle shaped like a parrot’s head and a large carpet bag. She wears white gloves, neat black kitten heel ankle shoes and opaque black stockings. She stands erect with her feet together facing outwards.**

**Within moments, Mary Poppins takes control of the Banks children, having every confidence in her own qualifications and merits – after all – she is positively perfect in every way.**

**Next we move to The Nursery. A door to the right leads into a tidy, light and airy room in the eaves of the house. To the right is cupboard space. To the left are two single beds with a small bedside table in between and pictures above and to the far left is Jane’s Dolls House. Above is an arc shaped window and a couple of lit wall lights. Mary Poppins quickly transforms the room to her liking by means of magic from her bag.**

**Their first outing with Mary Poppins is to the park along Cherry Tree Lane. Behind the tall austere railings sat on top of a low stone wall, is a backdrop of trees with people walking around in slow motion. A gardener sweeps up the fallen leaves, a couple of nannies pushing prams, a gentleman with a briefcase and a lady strolling along. A Park Keeper spies Bert painting his pictures hung on the front of the railings.**

**The children have reservations about the park as they sit on a bench in front of a statue of a boy sitting on a Dolphin. Mary teaches them that they must look past what they see and begins to illustrate this by bringing her magic into the park.**

**As the statue comes to life, Mary and Bert appear in bright summer clothes. Mary wears a bright pink pinafore dress over a frilled white blouse, pink hat and shoes, white gloves and stockings. Bert wears a purple beret, long purple jacket, purple and white check waistcoat over a white shirt, and matching check trousers. As Bert sings “It’s a Jolly Holliday” the park is transformed: the grass and trees become the richest green, the sky the richest blue and the sun the brightest yellow. They are joined by the ensemble similarly dressed in bright summer clothes. Even the Policeman is transformed into colourful uniform. The statues come to life in grey body suits from head to toe.**

**On their way home, they meet the Birdwoman - an old lady wearing a large hat with lilac flowers, a fringed shawl around her shoulders over a long ragged dress – carrying a basket on her arm with small bags of bird seed.**

**Back at the house, Mary manages the children whilst George – a tall lean man with short dark hair and a moustache - is working at his desk. His wife Winifred – a tall lady with auburn hair tied neatly in a chignon wearing a long beige skirt with a small bustle and a long sleeve blue blouse - feels in a dilemma with her role as wife and mother. She sends out invitations for a smart tea party with Mrs Brill making the preparations.**

**On the pavement outside No 17, Bert sweeps the gutter. The house is discretely turned around by Bert to show the back of the house, as he meets Admiral Boom and Miss Lark.**

**The back of the house then opens out to reveal the kitchen. In the middle is a large wood surfaced centre island with shelving either side and blue cupboards front and back. Behind is the large iron fireplace with stoves and a kettle on it. Above is a mantleshelf and lit wall lights. To the left is a large kitchen dresser with shelves filled with china plates and other crockery, with cupboards underneath. A picture of Queen Victoria is on the wall. To the right of the fireplace is the door and on the right hand wall is a half arc window and shelf. A cupboard stands alongside.**

**The children sabotage the kitchen with their efforts to help in the preparations and create a wonderful funny scene with very clever props artistry and impeccable timing.**

**Mary Poppins arrives to rescue the situation and works her magic once again to restore order through the song “A Spoonful of Sugar”.**

**Next we move to the Bank where the children’s father works. The Bank is a rather dismal and oppressive building. The monochrome backdrop is three dimensional in appearance with pillars on an oblique angle on either side leading up to an ornate glass domed ceiling. Drawn on the pillars in silhouette are pictures of clerks at their desks. Large mahogany double doors are at the back. It is a hive of industry with clerks moving around very business-like. The women wear long charcoal grey pin stripe skirts, white blouses and black ankle boots - their hair drawn back into tight buns, some wear glasses. The men wear black tail coats, dark trousers white shirts with winged collars, black tie and black shoes. All carry files or books.**

**Mary Poppins takes the children to visit their father at the bank and burst in whilst George is dealing with a client. Not happy to see them they return home.**

**They pass the austere columned façade of St Paul’ Cathedral. On the steps they meet the Birdwoman who proffers seed to the children and Mary Poppins.**

**They also meet Mrs Corry who runs a magic sweet shop that also sells words. A tall enigmatic lady with hair piled high on her head. She wears a bright orange dress with a large bustle layered with plates full of cakes. Two other ladies are dressed similarly in red and green dresses.**

**The Sweet shop is that of a large tent like structure in bright colours with the name CORRY lit up in the centre. The back is in pastel shade squares. In front is a double glass counter edged in wood with glass shelves filled with jars of different sweets. Other customers are similarly dressed in bright costumes – the men wearing hats.**

**Another magical spectacle is created through the wonderful song** "[**Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious)**.**

**The children arrive home in high spirits but the wind begins to blow.**

**Meanwhile, an enchanting scene follows with the toys in the nursery as Mary Poppins once more works her magic.**

**The main characters:**

Acclaimed Australian stars, **Stefanie Jones** and **Jack Chambers** reprise their roles as **Mary Poppins** and **Bert**, having both received critical acclaim and nightly standing ovations for their performances in the recent Australian production.

**George Banks – is played by Michael D Xavier**

**Winifred Banks – by Lucie-Mae Sumner**

**Jane and Michael Banks – are played by various actors throughout the tour – including Olivia Ainsworth and Charlie Donald.**

**Mrs Brill – by Rosemary Ashe**

**Bird Woman – by Patti Boulaye – a singer, actress and West End star with an illustrious career spanning 50 years.**

**Miss Andrew – the original & formidable Nanny of George Banks – by Wendy Ferguson**

**Robertson Ay – by Ruairidh McDonald**

**Admiral Boom – by David Burrows**

**Statues, Bank Clerks, customers, Puppeteers, Kite Dancers, Chimney Sweeps, Lamp-lighter, and inhabitants of Cherry Tree Lane played by members of the Company.**