



### The Emperor's New Clothes- Theatre Review

A review by Jen Brown.



Lukas Bailey as the Emperor, James Patrick Cronin as Ronald, Julie McKay as Princess Felicity, Kathy Garrick as Beatrice. Presented by Storybook Theatre. Photo Credit: Bonnie Kalisher.

What do you get when you combine a sweet princess, two not so evil crooks, and a very lovable Emperor? A delicious helping of warmth, wit and fuzziness, that's what! Yes, Storybook Theatre has done it again and in the opening performance of *'The Emperor's New Clothes'* they have served up a delightful concoction of high jinks, tomfoolery and to use the words in one of the many catchy songs - 'fun, fun, FUN!'

Like the *Emperor's New Clothes*, Storybook's latest offering is tailor made for children. (Not forgetting the grownups, who come along for the ride and have the time of their lives as well).

Simplicity, as ever, is a key ingredient to this Company's success in portraying much loved fairy tales. Top marks for the uncluttered set design, which was little more than a rail of clothes, (fit for an Emperor, of course), and a couple of well-placed trees. A turret here and there told us we were on Royal ground but we knew that already.

Our story began with Princess Felicity (JULIE MCKAY) making a breezy entrance through the auditorium and giving us the sweetest Princess ever. This enchanting daughter of the Emperor shared with our young audience her concerns about her Father's occasional silliness. Most of the children agreed with her that Dad's sometimes can be silly, but some, my two granddaughters included, voiced quite strongly and loudly, that their Dad's weren't silly at all. (Fair enough!)

The Princess was in fine voice and sang a song about her Father and his passion for clothes. She sang about the Emperor not being like other people. He did not sing about his country or his loved ones but about what he wore and how that whenever he was blue, only a new sock could cheer him up. The song "Clothes Make the Man" was a jolly air indeed but everyone who was listening carefully, sensed the sentiments were far from worthy.

When the Emperor (LUKAS BAILEY) arrived, his royal garb made a grand statement. His flowing red cloak and shiny crown left us in no doubt as to his flair and penchant for fine attire. All praise must go to the Wardrobe Department for the brightly coloured costumes that were befitting of Royalty and Commoners alike.

Our Emperor had great presence and we immediately loved him and worried about him at the same time. We could see quite clearly he might easily be duped. We shared his daughter's concerns and were proved right to do so when a pair of crooks took centre stage.

The tricksters, namely, Beatrice (KATHY GARRICK) and her son, Ronald (JAMES PATRICK CRONIN) were a duplicitous team, but as always, in Storybook Theatre's wonderful productions, the bad guys are never too threatening. A twinkle in the eye of a villain can nearly always be found, a huge relief for those chaperones with very young charges in tow.

And so this shiftv duo ran riot, bringing more mischief than malice to proceedings. They danced a very "creepy" dance and sang with gusto about

their love for the Wicked Stepmother in 'Cinderella' and the Witch in 'Hansel and Gretel' but declared, emphatically, that no-one was as bad as they were. They claimed to be 'rotten to the core' and easily the 'worstest of the worst', singing "They Got Nothin' on us".



They bragged about making money by swindling the rich and once they learned about the Emperor's love of fine garments, they hatched a plot to trick him into buying clothes that weren't really there. They asked the audience what they thought of such a plan and a very small 'Yippee' - from an unscrupulous grown-up - was the only encouragement needed for Beatrice to forge ahead with her scheme. These ruthless, but strangely likeable, robbers took us up to the intermission with a reprise of their song.

Over cookies and fruit juice the place buzzed with young voices expressing shock and disdain at the audacity of the tricksters Ronald, in the second Act, proved to be more honest than his Mom though; the forthcoming deception was not sitting well with him. All he ever wanted to do was play the trumpet and he said as much to the children in the audience. One of the many highlights of the show was when young volunteers joined Ronald onstage for his song - 'A Trumpet Guy'. Naturally, the kids stole the show displaying masterful strains on their gazoos!

The increasingly endearing Ronald inevitably took a shine to our gorgeous Princess and asked her, sincerely, if they should perhaps warn the Emperor of what was afoot. He didn't approve of what his Mother was up to and complained that he was tired of living a crooked life ... but Princess Felicity believed the time had come for her Father to be taught a lesson.

And so the 'clothes' were duly 'made' and the Emperor proclaimed that a Parade was to be staged to show off his dazzling new outfit. The proclamation was reiterated by a delightful young audience participant and the parade was deemed official. Our wide-eyed audience watched in wonder as our lovable Emperor cavorted about in all his glory (in a red onesie and a pair of brightly coloured boxer shorts, to be precise ... phew!). The children, at this point, could not contain their mirth. The sight of the Emperor in his undies was a sight to behold, indeed. I thought my two grandchildren might split their sides, they laughed so hard!

Princess Felicity's idea was a good one and the Emperor, when he eventually came out of hiding, soon admitted how foolish he had been. In an unselfish act of kindness that echoed the central message of the tale: "It is not what you wear that is important - but what you DO", he resisted the urge to send the villains packing and instead kindly invited them to stay on and make real clothes for the people of his Kingdom.

The outcome, as expected in any decent fairy tale, was magical and neat. Everyone learnt an important truth about being silly and our baddies saw the error of their ways. There was nothing left for our beloved characters to do, but enjoy the rest of their lives - happily ever after!

After the show, my girls got to meet the superb cast and had their photographs taken with them. We left Theatre West, grinning from ear to ear. Stella and Cynthia are still laughing and talking about the Emperor's new clothes that weren't - and hopefully the large stain on my T-shirt went unnoticed. I had, after all, taken them to see a wonderfully, brilliantly musical and let's face it - that's what is important!



Stella and Cynthia with cast members. Photo: Jen Brown

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