

Rapunzel: A Braid New World features hilariously dramatic retelling of beloved fairy tale

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Theatre Orangeville's latest pantomime production is funny, visually appealing and absolutely worth seeing for some much-needed laughs during the holiday season.

When one thinks of Rapunzel, plenty of things might come to mind - but Footloose probably isn't one of them. Yet you may be surprised more than once by Theatre Orangeville's dynamic retelling of the classic tale, which premiered last Friday.

Created by David Nairn, the theatre's artistic director emeritus, who returned to the director's chair, and Debbie Collins, Rapunzel: A Braid New World is the theatre's newest seasonal pantomime ? and the company has once again delivered a stellar performance.

The story, without giving too much away, begins with an extremely poorly executed vegetable theft ? one committed against the most wicked lady in the region, Vexangria. In his desperation to avoid a swiftly approaching reckoning, the thief strikes a bargain for his safe return, sacrificing his still-unborn child, who will grow into the Rapunzel we all know.

If this feels like an extreme escalation over stolen produce, you'd be right - but this is pantomime, and it's only the beginning of this wacky tale.

Audiences are introduced to a colourful range of quirky characters - fairies, witches, monsters, and magic mirrors - and each performance lands perfectly. The cast, returning from last year's pantomime, showcases expert comedic timing and musical talent, consistently earning laughs and applause.

The actors play off one another with such fluidity that it's easy to forget you're watching a production at all, rather than a genuine conversation between a baker and a witch. A hallmark of good pantomime is adaptability, and this cast excels at engaging the audience, reacting to their energy, and never letting a moment fall flat.

The blocking is equally well handled. No character ever feels underused or lost, even in full-cast scenes. Everyone remains visible, acknowledged, and ready with a joke or one-liner. Even when simply moving a prop, each performer stays in character, adding charm and humour through expressions and asides.

The jokes themselves are up-to-the-minute, with plenty of humour at Dundalk's expense. Running gags ? from easy-bake ovens to Vexangria's increasingly elaborate walking aids and Gen Z slang that leaves you unsure whether to laugh or cringe ? this production keeps the audience cracking up every other minute.

The musical numbers match the show's quirky energy. Audiences are encouraged to sing along if they can keep up. Fans of classic hits are treated to Footloose, while lovers of musical theatre will enjoy a nod to The Pirates of Penzance.

Live music adds even more charm. The decision to feature an on-stage performer providing well-timed sound effects and piano accompaniment adds an extra layer of warmth to the production that would have lacked without it.

Of course, no Theatre Orangeville show is complete without standout design work, and this production is no exception. The set is expertly crafted and makes excellent use of the stage space. Rapunzel's tower - or half-tower - rotates to reveal multiple settings and can be moved forward for a key solo or pushed back as Rapunzel searches for her long-lost friend (who may or may not be directly beneath it during a musical number).

Nothing is underused or left unoptimized. Nairn and the Theatre Orangeville team have once again raised the bar, delivering a production the town can take pride - and plenty of laughs - in.

Rapunzel: A Braid New World is a wacky, funny, unforgettable show that theatregoers won't want to miss. Catch it now through Dec. 21.