

## Press Reviews – *The Night Before Christmas*

### **Brighton Argus**

Forget about dragging the children around tawdry, tinsel-festooned shopping outlets. Christmas for small people means magic, excitement and lots of presents, and this is precisely what *The Night Before Christmas* provides. Based on a whimsical 19th-Century poem by Clement Clarke Moore, Big Wooden Horse Theatre Company has a winning formula that captures the essence of Christmas past with a contemporary twist.

Emily - who can hardly contain her excitement on Christmas Eve - dumps Eddie the mouse out into the cold, declaring that "mice don't celebrate Christmas". Eddie sets out to prove her wrong by tracking down Santa. He escapes the claws of the sinister family cat Cecil - brilliantly hammed up by Steven Pinder's Terry Thomas-like voice - who looms large above the scenery. Eddie also befriends the Christmas tree fairy and Dymotron, the Robot Warrior. No Buzz Lightyear, Dymotron longs to be a hero but settles rather sweetly for love and domesticity with ditsy Lizzie. Eddie and Emily, meanwhile, make up in time for the Christmas morning fest of presents, sweets and sleep-deprived grown-ups.

Catchy tunes, adult jokes - I particularly like put-upon Dad - and enthusiastic audience participation make this production more traditional than most pantos doing the rounds. Add sleigh bells, a sprinkling of fairy dust and giddy anticipation and you have Christmas, kiddy-style - just as it should be.

### **Surrey Advertiser**

The Mill Theatre, Guildford, was filled to bursting with three- to seven-year-olds. They'd brought their mummies and daddies to see *The Night Before Christmas*, and they were filled with a potentially explosive festive excitement. Even younger siblings were there too. Some were just out of nappies and some were experiencing their first theatre trip. Every one of them was a firm believer in Santa Claus. For just under an hour they were transported to a land of talking mice, loveable robots and fairies in ballet shoes, the set is simple, the songs are short and the traffic is definitely two way with the audience offering advice and rubbing their hands together to create the heat needed to recharge Dymotron's (the robot) batteries.

The young cast is a talented bunch. Only three of them, but they play five parts between them. Alice Jackson makes you believe against all odds that she's a little girl too excited to sleep on Christmas Eve. Later she reappears as a ditsy blonde fairy on her tea break, having trouble with her rhyming couplets. Cheryl Blaize makes a delightful little brown mouse, and Ed Burnside is a lovely daddy and an equally lovely robot. There isn't a baddy unless you count the giant cut out cat, with an upper crust accent and a predilection for mice, but he's doomed to failure anyway. There's a moral of course. Christmas is for everybody, even mice.

### **The Stage**

This show is the witty and attractive story about Eddie the mouse (Cheryl Blaize) evicted from a warm house on Christmas Eve by a rather thoughtless little girl (Emily Brooks) who can think only of her own forthcoming presents and says that Christmas isn't for mice. What follows is a quest for Eddie to get back into the house and enjoy Christmas, assisted by a robot toy (Jonathan Race), reminiscent of the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz* and a fairy from the top of the Christmas tree, doubled by Emily Brooks.

Blaize's beleaguered mouse is cheerful, funny and a charismatically acrobatic dancer. Race is totally convincing as the dad trying to get his daughter to sleep on Christmas Eve and is good value as the toy whose batteries keep failing so the audience has to provide warmth for recharging. Brooks' petulant Emily struts and pouts as she manipulates her father. And as Fairy Lizzie, she pirouettes and makes up silly rhymes. There's a lovely scene with a huge green-eyed cat puppet (silky voiced by Steve Pinder) who wants Eddie for supper. He is seen off by concerted audience woofing.

It's a small-scale show for very young children, but *The Night Before Christmas* - which makes imaginative use of single hinged flats for scene changes and has some good songs - is a fine piece of theatre.