

WE'RE GOING ON A BEAR HUNT



Produced by Kenny Wax and Nick Brooke.

Based on the book written by Michael Rosen and illustrated by Helen Oxenbury.

Directed by Sally Cookson

We're going to the theatre

We're going to see a Bear Hunt

What a beautiful play!

We're not scared....

Michael Rosen's award-winning book *We're Going On A Bear Hunt* is brought vividly and noisily to the stage in director Sally Cookson's fun-filled adaptation set to Benji Bower's versatile lively score.

Join our intrepid adventurers on their quest to find a bear; as they wade through the gigantic swishy swashy grass, the splishy splashy river and the thick oozy, squelchy mud! Expect catchy songs, interactive scenes and plenty of hands-on adventure – plus a few special surprises!

For children aged 3 and above. Running time: Approx. 55 minutes

“ingenious” DAILY MAIL

“A fun-filled frolic” GUARDIAN

“Quite simply, the best family show I've seen” SKY ARTS

Watch a trailer of the show and download our education pack from



Reviews from The Duchess, London

Adrian and Jake Zak Sky Arts 16th July 2009

Sky Arts' head planner, Adrian Zak, uses 'being a father' as an excuse to shriek at imaginary bears...

Recent children's laureate Michael Rosen's beloved children's adventure has been brought to the stage by director Sally Cookson and is, quite simply, the best family show I've seen.

The book's a slight volume but I needn't have worried about how they'd make the production last an hour because at the end of it everyone wanted more. The cast play their roles as the father, two kids and dog (yep a musical dog with a passing resemblance to Eric Morecambe. In a hunter's hat) admirably – catching the childlike behaviour and movement without resorting to panto and the puppetry for the baby brings it to life. Not sure where the mum is but

Imagination and simplicity are two reasons why the show succeeds so well – using simple props to portray the long wavy grass, thick oozy mud and, best of all, the deep river. Half a dozen blue towels, a dozen blue buckets and a splash of water... chuck in some water pistols and you have a) mild anarchy and b) a brilliant piece of theatre that had parents and kids alike shrieking as they got soaked...

My son, a tough critic who's been known to stand up in a cinema and walk out or simply say "I want to go home", loved it. He laughed, clapped and, a sign of the show's success, came out singing one of the songs.

The show's at London's Duchess Theatre until mid-August and then on a national tour – and it's highly recommended to keep the rugrats entertained.



Lyn Gardner The Guardian Thursday 16th July 2009

It seems daft that theatres sit silent and empty all day and only come alive at night, so it is nice to see the Duchess being put to multiple uses. In the evening, Ronald Harwood's *Collaboration* and *Taking Sides* take to the stage, while by day an adaptation of Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury's classic picture book celebrates "play" in every mischievous sense of the word.

In truth, Cookson's sunny and enjoyable production for the very young is not quite as deliciously scary and tension-filled as the original book, which works through a mixture of repetition and thrills. But then anything other than a cute but strangely anorexic giant teddy bear at the end, might well cause a riot as under-fives head en masse for the exit.

The willingness of the young to suspend their disbelief is part of the rough-and-ready charm here. What we get is a fun-filled frolic that makes terrific use of "poor" theatre techniques and allows the young audience to use their imaginations. A river is constructed from blue buckets and watering cans, mud evoked with handprints on paper and a forest conjured from stacks of cardboard boxes. A snowstorm is merely a sparkly sheet, but the children know exactly what it is and admire it with genuine wonder. This is a familiar title transposed from page to stage, but done with skill and a bubbling sense of fun.

Michael Coveney Whatsonstage 14th July 2009

While the Ronald Harwood season continues at the Duchess, the stage has been commandeered for morning and (on Sundays) matinee performances of this popular story by the outgoing Children's Laureate Michael Rosen, ideal for anyone three years old and upwards.

Quite a few two year-olds survived the bear hunt, too, as Dad and the kids, and baby and dog, tramped through various terrains, sang songs and found a bear in a narrow, gloomy cave before hurrying home to bed with their nursery teddies.

There's no attempt to reproduce the glorious colour wash of Helen Oxenbury's illustrations for Rosen's 1989 book by the director Sally Cookson and designer Katie Sykes (their adaptation was first seen at the Bristol Old Vic three years ago).

Instead, we have a curtain of shiny green strips for the long grass, a blue river of towels, pails and watering cans, a squelchy art class of brown paint and Tyrolean yodelling for the muddy swamp, a pile of cardboard boxes in the dark forest and a snowstorm of a billowing sheet and handfuls of fake flakes.

It's all very simple and ingenious and put across with a genuine Blue Peter niceness by the bespectacled quartet of Duncan Foster (as Dad), Gareth Warren, Victoria Andrews and Bob Karper as a furry-eared, guitar-strumming canine. And we all get wet in the river, as they squirt us with water pistols; one mum put up a broly in the stalls.

The bear itself is a bit of a non-frightening disappointment, but the cast have no qualms about revealing Dad inside the skin, pulling the strings, and no three year-old was remotely fazed by this Brechtian sleight of hand.

Benji Bower's music and lyrics are catchy and melodic, and we all joined in the chorus with minimal coercion: "What a beautiful day ... we're not scared." The rapt expressions on the little shining faces all around me were worth the price of my free ticket alone.



Rebecca Woolf Times Online 23rd July 2009

Why drama is great for kids

My daughter's class (year 2, which means they are 6 and 7) recently put on the most fantastic show. What was really terrific about it was how much fun they had with the preparations, and how much they supported each other while rehearsing and performing. Their teacher had done a great job setting the whole thing up, right down to the fact that every child had a couple of lines. It was a real group effort.

Watching the delight on the faces of the children made me wonder about the effects of drama. I've always loved the theatre and take my children to shows when I can. We have been spoilt of late, seeing two excellent children's productions, both of them very different. And I feel that our children definitely benefited from seeing something "live", and from moving into an imaginary world.

First my daughter and I attended a production of *The Tempest* (yep, by Shakespeare) at the Open Air theatre in Regent's Park. It may sound like unlikely fare for children (the target age group is 6 to 11 year olds), and it did stretch them, which is no bad thing. But it worked well - although some of it definitely went over my daughter's head, along with an awful lot of rain!

Tim Sheader, artistic director of the theatre, has *Macbeth* (sssh, whisper it) planned for next year, and was delighted with his first Shakespeare production for young people. The theatre, which has a strong education department, ran workshops for school pupils before they saw the production, and he says he loved seeing the interaction.

"I came up with this because I thought about the spirit, magician and monster, which sounded very Harry Potter," he says. "It's very visual and physical."

Sheader, who says he "loved" drama at school, thinks that it's wonderful for children.

"Children grow up really quickly and you can't stop that," he says. "But drama allows them to play, which they need. It gives them access to other worlds and lets them use their creativity and imagination. I understand that some people think the arts are exclusive or hard to access, but you have to be introduced to them. There's a skill about understanding Shakespeare."

I used to work with under-privileged children in the summer holidays, and once (a long time before Tim Sheader worked there) we took a group to the Open Air theatre to see a children's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. None of them had seen live theatre before, and most assumed we were going to the cinema.

When we arrived and they saw "real" people on stage, they were astonished. "This is really for us," said one 10 year old to me, amazed, while others asked if they could "have a go". I felt that the experience opened up a new world to them; it was a privilege to take them.

Rebecca Woolf is an actress and director, who now has two young children and runs drama clubs and storytelling drama workshops for schools and nurseries. She is passionate about the "benefits" of drama, both watching and taking part.

"Watching drama encourages listening skills and triggers the imagination," she says. "The fact that it's real life is a real thrill, and makes it unpredictable and a bit dangerous."

When it comes to actually taking part in plays, Woolf says that drama encourages so many things which schools are meant to foster.

"It helps children to listen to each other, to be considerate to each other's ideas, to try and experiment and it also really helps build confidence. Even at a very young age it can get the imagination going."

I could see that in action last Sunday when my family and I went to see a theatrical production of 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' at London's Duchess Theatre (it's soon to go on tour too).

This show is based on Michael Rosen's famous book, and targets 3 to 6 year olds. The theatre was full of children that age and younger, and most were enraptured by the play, they particularly loved the interaction (the audience took part in songs and were sprayed with water) and loved the innovative sets. After all, there is something magical about seeing someone unfold a piece of paper and use it as a butterfly. You have to suspend belief, but I can only think that being exposed to something like this is good for a child. It can really open his or her imagination.

Sally Cookson, director of the show (a still of which you can see above), says that she sees it as "taking children on a journey".

"A lot of teachers find drama quite scary, because they feel it can get out of hand and rowdy," she adds. "But I think that children are expected to sit at the table and concentrate for a long time at school. Drama lets them go into play mode, and opens the door into an imaginary world."



Stoke Regent Theatre – Liz Rowley

Imagination lay at the core of Michael Rosen's award-winning story *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, brought to life at the Regent yesterday morning thanks to director Sally Cookson. Just as *The Tiger Who Came To Tea* delighted youngsters last month, this popular tale had children shouting out loud, singing along to catchy tunes and getting wet from giant water pistols – all so one man and his young family could go in search of a grizzly bear. The story only asks for four characters which includes the family's dog played by Bob Karper, who also doubles as a very lively and talented musician. Duncan Foster took on the role of the dad who helped his son, played by Chris Yapp, and daughter, Victoria Andrews, make their way through the adventure of a lifetime. Sets were minimal for this hour-long show, but very effective. First up was the tall grass that swept across the stage blocking the path. "We can't go over it. We can't go under it. We'll have to go through it," was the cry from the stage. And so they did. Obstacle overcome, the family didn't get far before a deep river stood in front of them. With blue towels and buckets used to stretch the effect, the family waded through the water, laughing and joking along the way. All seemed well until the journey turned muddy. This can only mean one thing in children's theatre – a mud fight. It was a great moment to

introduce some classic slapstick comedy and the characters had no trouble in making everyone laugh as they played tricks on each other with their big buckets of mud. But if mud wasn't bad enough, it seemed that the family would never reach their goal as a thick snowstorm soon had them covered.

Without giving too much away, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* is a great piece of theatre for everyone to enjoy.

It's funny, imaginative, captivating, enchanting and well worth a look.

