Edinburgh Fringe 2015 review: Damsels in Success: Fairytales Retold

Not Cricket's Productions's take on fairytale classics entertain children and impress reviewer Amy Wong

Thursday 13 August 2015

Image: Not Cricket Productions

★★★★☆

Venue: C Nova

Not Cricket Productions' *Damsels in Success: Fairy Tales Retold* is a predictably madcap fifty minutes of fun which sees three children – Jeremy, Rose and Alex – retell classic fairy tales with the help of their babysitter Amy and the audience. Despite being adults, the actors playing the three siblings (Joel Bates, Golfo Migos and Ross Telfer respectively) do a fantastic job of conveying their characters' childish curiosity and indignation. Their ages rarely detract from their performances, with Migos particularly standing out as the precocious Rose. Her strong stage presence demands the audience's attention, while Bates gives a more understated but nonetheless convincing performance as the dinosaur-mad Jeremy. Their contrasting acting styles make them a perfect match when they play Hansel and Gretel.

Telfer does a better job as the various fairy tale characters he plays, including the father in *Hansel and Gretel* and the prince in *Sleeping Beauty*, than as Alex as a character in his own right. His larger than life acting style makes him an instant hit with the audience as he dons a neon green afro to play a witch and

takes control of a purple bird puppet.

While the concept of mocking fairy tale conventions and inconsistencies for comic effect is not exactly new, the cast of *Damsels in Success* bring such energy to the stage that it's hard not to be won over by their versions of *Hansel and Gretel* and *Sleeping Beauty*. There are plenty of laughs to be had as Rose questions the logic of a gingerbread house that can withstand the rain, the ability of a duck to carry two children across a river and the assumption that Gretel is permanently distressed.

The staging is perfectly tailored to the show's young audience. The cushions scattered across the floor create a relaxed, informal atmosphere while the lighting is kept simple and fuss-free. The book pages plastered over the walls and floor add a slightly whimsical touch to a well-designed set.

Not Cricket Productions consistently prove that they understand children. They know exactly what will keep them entertained and the sorts of things they get up to. The characters' resourceful use of everyday items as fairy tale props realistically mimic the child's play as a crown is fashioned out a cake tin, a dinosaur toy becomes a baby and an umbrella is used as a sword. All of the actors interact with the audience with ease, inviting children on stage to play wicked witches and a forest of thorns. Props are cleverly hidden among the cushions and items are borrowed from audience members then incorporated into the show. All of these things help to sustain the audience's attention which can be a difficult task when performing for children.

One of the best things about *Damsels in Distress* is that nobody takes themselves too seriously. All of the actors look like they're having a huge amount of fun, which means the audience enjoys themselves too. In short, *Damsels in Success* is a lively,engaging and fast-paced show – everything that children's theatre should be.

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