

# The Wee Free Men

By Sir Terry Pratchett. Adapted and directed by Pamela Munt. Unseen Theatre Company. Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide. 15-30 April, 2016.



This latest journey by Unseen into the uniquely creative world of Terry Pratchett may well prove highly popular to his staunchest fans, but probably has less to offer the average viewer than earlier excursions.

The first half-hour or so is highly promising indeed, offering up generous servings of Pratchett's typically delightful wordplay and clever wit, delivered by the cast - including, but not limited to, Olivia Cameron as Footnote the Narrator - with sharp timing and elegant enunciation. There is also amusement generated in the early stages by illustrating comically quirky metaphysical ideas using decidedly low-tech design concepts.

The characters of Tiffany, Toad, and Miss Tick establish themselves in their initial scene as an engaging and dynamic triple act. It is made clear that Tiffany will have a somewhat spikier personality than your average heroine, which adds an extra layer of intrigue.

The blue-skinned title characters are colourfully quirky, making an undeniably impressive visual impact through facial hair-pieces and make-up. Toad is fantastically well-costumed in a yellow suit, complementing Hugh O'Connor's excellent physical acting and facial expressions, while Tiffany is herself appropriately tailored to remind us of Lewis Carroll's Alice.



Unfortunately, the story that attempts to bring these elements together - as well as to bring the audience along with them - never quite becomes compelling enough, at least to a non-devotee of Terry Pratchett's writing. Though the plotting feels less busy and less convoluted here than what is usually found in the Discworld series, this reviewer found it less interesting and never fully engaging.

Young performer Josephine Giorgio has a large task to fulfill in providing a centre to this show and carrying it virtually from beginning to end. She has a strong presence on stage, and the character of Tiffany gains depth in the second act, but her delivery tends toward the one-note, which limits our involvement with her

journey. A couple of secondary character portrayals are pitched at a childish level which grated on this reviewer's nerves.

The heroine's quest to retrieve her kidnapped brother recalls the iconic fantasy film *Labyrinth*, except that it was exceedingly easy to wish that a child as revolting as the Pratchett creation would never be retrieved. The climax is unfortunately hampered by the lack of menace exuded by the nominal villain - though she too has been impressively costumed by designer Michelle Whichello.

Director Pamela Munt expresses in her programme notes the commendable desire to connect both new actors and new audiences to the world of the theatre. One always wishes the best of success to anyone in this endeavour, even if *The Wee Free Men* feels like a disappointment relative to Unseen Theatre Company's previous achievements.

*Anthony Vawser*

Photographer: Michael Errey