

The Wee Free Men
Unseen Theatre Company
Bakehouse Theatre
Until 30 April 2016



Cordial, stimulating, and above all funny, *The Wee Free Men* is a rare stage adaptation that more than lives up to the standard set by its creator, author, the late, Sir Terry Pratchett.

A radiant roller-coaster jaunt of colour, exposition and fantastical incidents, Pamela Munt's stage version of Pratchett's first Discworld novel to feature Tiffany Aching (Josephine Girogio), is almost as entertaining as the book. And though a lot of that comes down to the show's intrepid direction, it's also due to the main attractions. In this adaptation that's not the clever and satirical dialogue, but the eccentricity of the fine ensemble and the delivery of the humorous lines.

Here's the thing about fantasy on stage: it's usually far superior or a good deal shoddier than real life. The action in this production is inflated; exuberant slices of satire that begins with a simple knock-knock joke and ends with sprawling whopping wedges of laugh-out-loud humour. Emotionally, though, it's not rational, but it is funny as it gets.

Munt devises and adapts the group's productions, and it consistently works. She also has the knack of finding performers who seamlessly transition between multiple characters, in scenes that are by turns animated and affecting.

A not-by-chance meeting in a tent leads to a magical adventure. A teacher, Miss Tick (Alycia Rabig) - who is also an undercover witch - educates a new student Tiffany Aching on the meaning of witchcraft. The stuff of nightmares threatens the world, and when Miss Tick goes for help she leaves her toad familiar (Hugh O'Connor) to assist Tiffany. But Tiffany isn't helpless; she's armed with her trusty frying pan, and aided by the Nac Mac Feegle—aka the Wee Free Men—a clan of vicious, hard-drinking, claymore-wielding, six-inch-high blue men.

When the Faerie Queen (Elaine Fardell), kidnaps, Tiffany's baby brother Wentworth (Aimee Ford), the want-to-be witch heads into fairyland to rescue her sibling. With cries of "Nae king! Nae quin! Nae laird! Nae master! We willna' be fooled again!" and "They can tak' oor lives but they canna tak' oor trousers!" the Nac Mac Feegle Pictsies help their new hag, fight ferocious hounds, headless horsemen and the sinister Queen of the Elves herself.

The show is an absolute riot of comedy and resourceful staging, as Tiffany leads us through a series of set pieces in the weird locations where, one by one, the naughty Pictsies dispose of the real and imagined enemies with brute force, ignorance and comic invention. Pretty much all of the action is a scrumptious treat - from the Benny Hill style chases to the sheep-stealing, fight scenes and an amusing death scene.

It overflows with appealing performances and comic charm. It's a gorgeous little play that is beautifully executed with a story that will have you smiling throughout. Don't miss it! Or there will be a reckoning! Crivens!

Stephen Davenport - Barefoot Review