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Book of Beasts

Published **Wednesday 25 March 2009** at **13:45** by **Thom Dibdin**

Charming, inventive and engaging throughout, Catherine Wheels has another potential hit on its hands in this new adaptation of E Nesbit's short story of 1900.

The crux here is director Jo Timmins' ability to find and reveal the original's direct simplicity - in a way that is both enchantingly naive and fascinating to those who live in a more cynical age. She is helped by designer Karen Tennent's ability to use basic elements of play and invention to create a set in which magical beasts can arise from nursery furniture and devour rooms full of parliamentarians or stadiums full of footballers.

Before curtain-up, Ian Cameron as the Chancellor and Gill Robertson as Nurse are out in the auditorium, creating a rapport with their audience. So that when Scott Turnbull is revealed, playing with his Tory soldiers, the story can commence with at least one level of invention already created and, critically, the time frame of a century ago needing no further stating.

If the hint here is that this is all going on in Lionel's head, his sudden rise to kingship, discovery of the magical Book of Beasts and accidental release of a dragon, which begins to eat his loyal subjects, is vividly told. The very human level of his strategy for dealing with it - trying to ignore it or bribing his subjects with parties - engages with all audience members, not just the target over-fives. Strongly themed music by David Trouton helps add a continuity to the whole. A real delight.

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Production information

By:

Catherine Wheels, based on the book by E Nesbit

Composer:

David Trouton

Management:

Catherine Wheels Theatre Company

Cast:

Scott Turnbull, Gill Robertson, Ian Cameron

Director:

Jo Timmins

Design:

Karen Tennent

Lighting:

Lizzie Powell

Production information can change over the run of the show.