

REVIEW: Family-friendly musical delivers a school holiday treat

Oh Taranaki, you're off to great places! Today is the day! A magical show is waiting... so get on your way.

If these school holidays you are on a quest for whimsy and fun, then the bright and bold musical *Seussical Jr* is the one.

Beloved tales from the treasure trove of Dr Seuss's vivid imagination have been brought to life by New Plymouth Operatic Society, much to the delight of audiences packed with the young and the young at heart.

Like a bedtime story that filters into the dreams of children, *Seussical Jr* is bouncing with fantastical fun, and bursting with bustling adventures.

This high-energy musical weaves together some of the most iconic characters in children's literature - including the Cat in the Hat, Horton the Elephant, a collection of Whos, and even The Grinch. They are conjured from the imagination of young Jojo Boy, and burst onto the stage to delight, dance and sing their way through a wacky adventure.

Directed by Ryan Jacobs, with musical direction by Philippa Drinkwater and choreography by Helena Harvey, this fun-filled family musical is a must-see for children these school holidays.

Featuring a cast of Taranaki youngsters, it's wonderful to say that from there to here, from here to there, talented things are everywhere.

Suspend your disbelief because I do not fool, this brilliant bunch are still at school. The youngest star is at primary, and no one on stage is older than 18. To see such spirited passion in people so young is fabulously uplifting. Oh, the places they'll go.

While there are plenty of stand-outs in *Seussical Jr*, the most magical moments are when the entire cast of 48 are together on stage. The energetic ensemble pieces hit all of the right notes and shine with enthusiasm and exuberance. The lively *Oh, the Thinks You Can Think* and *Green Eggs and Ham* are particularly superb.

In the first show of the season the mischievous Cat in the Hat, played by Charlie Betts, was a crowd favourite and drew giggles aplenty from the tiny theatregoers. Amélie Tippett shone as the fabulous Mayzie la Bird, Bryah Edwin was a delightfully charming Gertrude McFuzz, while Benjamin Barlett and Sofia Asi did a great job as Whoville's Mr and Mrs Mayor.

Thomas Grieve gave an enthralling and touching performance as Horton the Elephant, and Jana Tauwhare-George as Sour Kangaroo was filled with attitude and sass. Both of these stars brimmed with wondrous talent beyond their years.

With brains in their head and feet in their shoes, Caleb Asi and Penny Maton rounded out the main cast as the endearing Jojo Boy, and the sassy Young Kangaroo. The pair of pint-sized personalities proved you're never too young, too small, or too wild, to pick up a script and dazzle a child.

The bold and fantastical world in which *Seussical Jr* takes place provides endless creative opportunities on the stage, with the fabulous costuming team, lighting designers, set creators, and makeup artists all unleashing their wizardry.

This junior production has inspired some genuine whimsy in the technical team, and it's invigorating to see what inventive solutions the imagination can come up with when the more razzle dazzle elements of a bigger budget are gone. Torches are used to great effect, rivers are made from flowing pieces of material, sets become versatile, and footlights shine magically. It really is a delightful reminder of what can be achieved with curiosity and creativity.

Operatic must be commended for their first Junior Broadway show. Not only is it a fantastic opportunity for Taranaki's budding stars, it's also a splendid chance for many children to experience the magic of going to the theatre. It's heartwarming to witness so many normally rambunctious kids sitting wide-eyed and enchanted, while enjoying the spellbinding charm of live storytelling.

That excitement spilled into the foyer after the show, with little ones acting out their favourite bits, and retelling snippets of the story. One young girl put it perfectly when asked what the best part of the show was. "All of it! I loved all of it," she said gleefully.

So, these school holidays, if the sun does not shine and it's too wet to play, don't sit in the house on that cold, cold, wet day. Come to theatre and get ready to play, you'll be warmed by the magic of Junior Broadway.

REVIEW

Seussical Jr

New Plymouth Operatic Society

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Theatre Royal | TSB Showplace

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