

In their first post-pandemic production, Repertory Theatre presents Wyrd Sisters, a play adapted from the bestselling novel by Terry Pratchett. Backstage Christchurch - Theatre Reviews reviewer Jordon Jones had a marvellous time, and concludes that “for fans of Terry Pratchett, Repertory’s production of Wyrd Sisters is a must-see. The love of Pratchett’s work, and of the art of theatre, is plain to see in this show, especially in the details.”

Reviewed by Jordon Jones for Backstage Christchurch - Theatre Reviews

Out of the darkness, three shadowy figures take shape, hunched around a cauldron. One of the figures lets loose a great cackle: “When shall we three meet again?” In this opening moment, one could be forgiven for thinking they had wandered into a performance of Macbeth by mistake. Such misconceptions are easily remedied, however, when the other two shadowy figures stand up to consult their pocket diaries (“I can do next Tuesday.” “I’m babysitting on Tuesday.”). Ah, there we are, that classic Terry Pratchett humour. The late author’s Discworld series is beloved by fantasy readers worldwide; if you are among those fans, you may recognise the opening of Wyrd Sisters, one of the best-known Discworld novels and, also, a stage adaption of that novel by Stephen Briggs. For those who aren’t already familiar with Wyrd Sisters, it follows a similar premise to Shakespeare’s infamous Scottish play: Duke Felmet and his conniving wife have murdered King Verence to steal the throne, and the kingdom of Lancre is having none of it. As indicated by the title, Wyrd Sisters focuses on a trio of characters that Shakespeare didn’t give a lot of stage time to—the witches. There are, naturally, three witches in Lancre’s coven. Magrat Garlick is the maiden, a somewhat naïve but very enthusiastic novice witch. The mother is

Nanny Ogg, the salt-of-the-earth matriarch of an extensive brood of children and grandchildren. And Granny Weatherwax, severe and eminently pragmatic, is... the other one.

At the opening of the play, the three witches suddenly find themselves in possession of the late King Verence’s crown, as well as his son. They manage to conceal both child and crown with a troupe of strolling players to keep them out of the clutches of the Duke and Duchess Felmet, with the hope that when the child is grown he will come back to Lancre to take back the throne of his father. The land, however, can’t wait that long, so perhaps a little bit of witchy meddling is in order...

The first thing I want to say about Repertory’s production of Wyrd Sisters is that it is a visual treat, skilfully combining whimsy and eccentricity. The costumes are bright and quirky (except for the older witches, who look suitably witchy), and fit the characters’ personalities and the slightly off-kilter Discworld setting perfectly. The set includes a witch’s cottage in one back corner and part of the castle in the other, with a forest in the middle, which provides a nice visual for the main conflict of the play in addition to facilitating easier scene changes. Both the cottage and castle set pieces include charming details that really bring out the setting, such as a pentagram made of household utensils and a hedgehog as Lancre’s royal badge. My absolute favourite part of the set, and the most impressive, is the map of the Discworld (hand-painted!) covering the floor of the stage, complete with the Great A’Tuin’s head. Stunning.

Technologically, Repertory continues to deliver spot-on results. The lighting and sound effects complement each other seamlessly, adding an extra layer of fun to the show. Fun fact: the music used in the show was composed specifically for this production by Amelia Hill, who also operates the lights! Could this be the beginning of a series of collaborations? I

certainly hope so; the music was a perfect fit and very well polished.

And now I come to the actors. Director Dimitri Gibara has a reputation for having excellent instincts for casting, and he has once again assembled a solid group, some of whom could almost have stepped out of the pages of Pratchett's novel onto the stage. One such actor is Elayne Buckler, whose Granny Weatherwax carried herself with great poise and gravitas. Of the witches, Granny is the one with the most commanding presence, and Elayne made that presence fully palpable. To contrast with Granny's seriousness, Pat Hannah's Nanny Ogg was exceptionally nonchalant and familiar, like a dear friend's mum. Rounding out our occult trio is Elisabeth Clapham as Magrat—she played up the young witch's earnest pluckiness with gusto, but tempered it with a sheen of romanticism. Magrat's romantic foil in the play is the Fool, played by Jack Mould. Jack absolutely fizzed with energy, making him a good match for Elisabeth's vivacity. He was arresting to watch, even earning a bit of applause all for himself after his monologue. Equally compelling was Team Evil, i.e. the Duke and Duchess. Kirk Moore easily hit his stride as Duke Felmet, with fantastic comedic timing and emotional energy as his character's paranoia sinks deeper and deeper. As Lady Felmet, Bernadette Richardson's haughty gentility was a perfect balance to Kirk's nervousness (and increasing ferality). She was steely, she was sexy, and she was clearly having a lot of fun being a villain. The Felmet's relationship was accentuated by great onstage chemistry between the actors, who complemented each other very convincingly.

Another actor who seemingly sprang straight from the novel is Sydney Hogarth, who played the manager of the strolling players, Vitoller. Sydney is a born showman, and this role as a charming, larger-than-life thespian provided him with the scope to indulge in all the enthusiasm and bombast he could possibly desire. Michael Woods played

Tomjon, the secret heir to the Lancre throne who is under the impression that he's just an actor. Michael brimmed with youthful confidence, showing an instinct for craft that makes me very excited to see how he develops as an actor. The third pillar of the troupe of players is Hwel, the playwright. In this role, Wesley van Gelderen was a pinnacle of sophistication, with dynamic elegance flowing through his performance with ease.

However well-suited and talented the actors playing the major characters are, they would be nowhere without a good supporting cast. A round of applause please for Justine Aldous, Russell Haigh, Gwylim Wogan, Alastair Gray, Maurice Barnes, Mark Reid, Kerrin Reid, and Alisdair Muir, who all juggled multiple hats as players, soldiers, robbers, and guards. I want to give a particular shout-out to Alistair Gray, whose turn as a demon was delightfully memorable and garnered a bit of clapping in itself, and Maurice Barnes, who infused the Ghost of King Verence with the levels of nobility and indignation necessary for his unfortunate situation. As an ensemble, the cast gelled well together, which is vital to a show's success. Bravo!

For fans of Terry Pratchett, Repertory's production of *Wyrd Sisters* is a must-see. The love of Pratchett's work, and of the art of theatre, is plain to see in this show, especially in the details. Even if you aren't familiar with the Discworld books, you will, I guarantee, have a most enjoyable time. Who knows, maybe you'll find a new favourite author!

**Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters*, adapted
by Stephen Briggs
Canterbury Repertory Theatre
Elmwood Auditorium, 19 May 2021**