

Cinderella's beautiful but she's definitely not Petty

This slipper fits

If you think riding herd on the nog at your annual Yule bash is a chore, don't ever try staging a Christmas panto.

As bartender, all you have to worry about is keeping the alcohol consumption at a comfortable level — somewhere between relaxed and silly — until cabs take everybody home.

Stage a panto, however, and the spirits you'll be dispensing are a lot more volatile than anything served up by the LCBO.

We're talking Christmas spirit, of course, best served just the way kids like it: Laced with silliness and cut with just the faintest edge of a storyline.

Over the years, producer Ross Petty has become something of a master at

this, honing the old English music hall tradition into something uniquely Canadian in his annual Toronto staging. He assembles a strong team and slowly

perfects the mix to keep young audiences entertained without ever letting things degenerate into Christmas chaos.

This year's edition, now playing at the Elgin and titled *Cinderella, The Sparkling Family Musical*, leaves one wishing Petty and company would let things slip just a little closer to chaos, just for the sheer thrill of it all.

That's not to say there isn't plenty of fun afoot in this fractured take on a girl, a prince, a pumpkin patch and a slipper.

Working with much the same creative team he used in last year's successful staging of *Robin Hood*, Petty

has come up with a panto that combines all the traditional elements with a few new twists.

For romance, he's got Jennifer Gould and Adam Brazier in a fine portrayal of Cinderella and her fella. For

comedy, he's got an entire smorgasbord — polished comedic actors such as Cliff Saunders and Jonathan Wilson teamed with veteran funnyman and master of the malaprop, Don Harron, all aided and abetted by media diva Erin Davis as the fairy godmother and mistress of ceremonies.

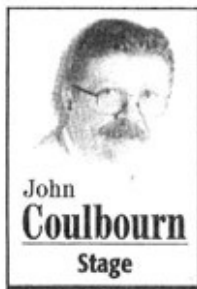
Every good panto, though, must have a dame and Petty himself is delicious as Cinderella's wicked step-mother. Think Carol Channing, blissed out on bad testosterone. As the aesthetically

challenged step-sisters, Mary Ellen Mahoney and Karen Skidmore round out the crew.

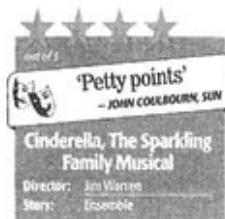
Working from a collaborative script, bolstered by tunes from music director David Warrack (who obviously feels that the old saw about "something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue" isn't just for brides anymore), director Jim Warren and choreographer Tracey Flye team with designer Jean-Claude Olivier to make *Cinderella* a very uptown sort of affair.

In the process, however, they've gone sparing on the kind of over-the-top silliness that Petty the actor does so well, and even though it is still every inch "the sparkling family musical" it claims to be, *Cinderella* is a little poorer for it.

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JENNIFER GOULD plays the lucky lady in the Ross Petty production of *Cinderella, The Sparkling Family Musical*. The fairy tale runs until Dec. 31 at the Elgin Theatre.

