

CINDERELLA

Smart, silly and sweet sums it up

Cinderella

★★★★ (out of four)

By Chris Earle. Directed by Ted Dykstra.
Until Jan. 4 at the Elgin Theatre, 189
Yonge St. 416-872-5555

RICHARD OUZOUNIAN

THEATRE CRITIC

All art forms eventually reach perfection and Ross Petty's holiday family entertainments are no exception. The thirteenth year is the lucky one for Petty, because *Cinderella*, which opened last night at the Elgin Theatre, is not only the most hilarious show in Toronto, but an awesome piece of entertainment in its own right.

For once, the balance between silliness and sentiment is nicely calibrated; the show is a joy to look at and the cast is wonderful right down the line.

Where to begin the praise? Author Chris Earle deserves the first nod, because he's kept the solid framework of the classic *Cinderella* story intact, while opening it up just enough to allow all the modern references we crave to creep in.

"You won't find that at *The Nutcracker!*" sneers Petty's Bertha Von Botox after a sizzling dance number, his obligatory annual dig at his beloved spouse, the National Ballet's Karen Kain.

"I need an epidural" shrieks out the Paris Hilton-esque creation that Dan Chameroy makes of Plumbum Von Botox while struggling to try on the elusive slipper.

And when Adam Brazier's husky Carnivia Von Botox (who shops at La Senza Big and Tall) is asked what she wants to turn into, she sighs



PAULA WILSON PHOTO

From left, the Wicked Stepmother (Petty) with stepdaughters Plumbum (Chameroy) and Carnivia (Brazier).

wistfully, "A souvlaki?"

The jokes keep a-coming, but so does the plot and Earle does a job of joining them together that a master carpenter would envy.

Director Ted Dysktra is next up for praise. The show features a lot of his inspired insanity, but none of his annoying looseness. We probably have choreographer Tracey Flye to thank for a lot of the slick pace because the show is movement driven, with her trademark ability to mock pop forms while executing them with panache.

The whole ballroom scene is an extended parody of *So You Think You Can Dance* and you haven't lived till you've seen Petty and four unwilling chorus boys do a mambo that sets sex back at least 60 years.

Steve Ross's lighting scintillates and Erika Connor's costumes are a treat.

But best of all is the cast. I've already talked about how hilarious Brazier and Chameroy, two of the butchest men in showbiz, are as the evil stepsisters and Petty has never been more in control as the Wicked Stepmother. With his balcony-like bosom and shoe-polish black hair, you'd swear he was channelling Barbara Amiel.

Paula Brancati is a winningly feisty Cinderella, Jake Epstein the hunkiest of all Prince Charmings and Eddie Glen combines huggability and muggability in Buttons.

But best of all is Patty Sullivan's Fairy Godmother. Years of working on children's television programs has taught her just how to talk to young audiences, but her decades of musical theatre experience have enabled her to sing and shine with real class. She's got a sweet, sweet spirit that illuminates the whole show.

Cinderella is a smashing time for everyone from four to 94.

Make sure you don't miss it.