

Entertainment / Stage

Theatre villain Ross Petty will retire from performing after this Christmas

Actor known for creations like Revolta Bulldoza in Cinderella will continue to produce pantos at Toronto's Elgin Theatre.



Photo by Paula Wilson

By: Richard Ouzounian Theatre Critic, Published on Thu May 28, 2015

Ross Petty is getting ready to take his final booooooo.

The man whose malevolent presence has motivated mirth during the holiday season for the past two decades is playing his final performance at the Elgin Theatre on Jan. 3, 2016.

And his final tour de force will be as one of the most beloved of all villains, Captain Hook from Peter Pan.

"I figured if Dame Edna and David Letterman thought it was time to retire, then it was my turn, too," snarled Petty over the phone from his Toronto office.

But Petty hastens to announce that he is only retiring from performing, not producing, and that the raucous family entertainments he has made an indelible part of Toronto theatre will continue.

In fact, he is stepping down as an actor to focus all his energies on producing.

"At my age, I had to make some tough choices," says Petty, who turns 69 this summer. "If I had my way, guess I'd keep acting forever, but then who's to raise the money to get these shows onstage? It was more important to me that they continue and, after 20 years at the Elgin Theatre, I not just say 'Buh-bye, it's been swell.'"

Over the years, Petty's shows have changed and grown with the times, evolving from British retreads where oldish casts sang musical theatre parodies in front of fading painted backdrops to now, where hip young things sing "Shake It Off" in front of flashing LED screens.

But through it all, Petty himself has remained eternal, using his impressive physical stature and growling baritone voice to full comic effect whether he played male or female villains.

It's been an impressive gallery, including such original characters as Revolta Bulldoza in Cinderella and Queen Farfrompoopin in Snow White, but it's interesting that Petty has chosen to go out playing a male role.

"Everybody always says they love me when I'm in a dress, but I wanted people to know that I am still a member of the male sex," he says, a statement that should delight his wife of over 30 years, Karen Kain, artistic director of the National Ballet of Canada.

As when any royalty leaves their throne, the question of succession becomes very important. Will the Petty pumps be filled by two of the other longtime cast members, genial Eddie Glenn, playing Smee this season, or the formidable Dan Chameroy, whose Plumbum is one of the most unique comic creations on our stages?

"I don't even want to think about that until this final show is over," says Petty. "I'm a very emotional guy and there's going to be a tear in my eye all through this final process."

Another reason it was wise he chose to go out with a male role: less mascara to run.

Go to rosspetty.com for more information on Peter Pan and Petty's final bow.