



Snow charming

Ross Petty scores again with holiday pantomime **Snow White** — and it's the best one yet

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The cast of *Snow White: The Deliciously Dopey Family Musical*

Elgin Theatre
5.0 stars

Starring: The ensemble
Directed by: Tracey Flye

In a world where everyone seems intent on bending the best of modern technology to recreate an old fashioned Christmas, Ross Petty stands alone. For 16 years, he's been bending, folding, stapling and mutilating the age-old tradition of British pantomime to

create a slice of cool Yule foolery here on the banks of the Don that is as unique to muddy York as our penchant for beat-up Fords that no longer run on all cylinders.

In this, his 17th year, however, it must be said that Petty manages to scale new heights, offering up a frivolous festive confection that has everything we've come to expect — and a little bit more.

Specifically, what *Snow White: The Deliciously Dopey Family Musical* (which opened Thursday at the Elgin Theatre) has this time out is writers — three of 'em, in fact, share the credit, where in previous years, it was often difficult to find even a single one to take the blame.

And what Rick Miller, Carolyn Bennett and Malcolm Clarke have come up with in their first panto-laboration is little short of inspired, with pure and simple Snow White (played by Melissa O'Neil) teaming up with a slightly over-the-Highland-hill James Bond (a very funny Graham Abbey), a brace of fairytale characters, and a few denizens of the urban jungle, all to defeat her evil stepmother.

The evil queen, not surprisingly, is the latest Petty-in-Pepto proving that while it may take a village to raise a child, all it takes to get them completely engaged in a bunch of whimsical nonsense is a man in a dress.

It becomes, of course, a memorable bawdy brawl, but in the end, of course, evil doesn't stand a chance. But all that means is getting there is all the fun. What with Bryn McAuley's scene-stealing turn as Red Riding Hood, David Cotton's high test blend of vacuity and virility as Jack-In-The-Beanstalk and the truly inspired union of Billy Lake (as an anything but a wooden Pinocchio) and Reid Janisse (as the last of the Three Little Pigs, served up with a very big Cherry in his mouth), seasoned pros like Petty, Abbey and the perennial Eddie Glen, this time playing Infestus, the court fool, end up having to fight tooth and nail for their share of the scenery to shred.

It's pretty impressive scenery, too, thanks to designer Michael Gianfrancesco, who teams up with Erika Connor (costumes), Steve Ross (lights) and Ben Chasson and Beth Kates, whose Playground Studio supplies an impressive video element.

Then, of course, there are the too-wonderful-to-be-shameless plugs to Petty's list of loyal sponsors, dressed up as tongue-in-cheeky TV ads by Ted Dykstra, and offering the same sort of entertainment value-added bonus as Super Bowl ads, all at a discount price.

Under the direction of Tracy Flye, with choreography by Marc Kimelman, it's good silly fun, only occasionally putting a bit too much "Eh?" in "risque," and if, in the end, it all feels a trifle long, well, welcome to a good old-fashioned season of excess, where Petty-style and *Gangnam-style* come together in true Toronto style.