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Snow White shenanigans

Ross Petty offers a different take on the dwarf tale with *Snow White and the Magnificent Seven*

Ross Petty has been looking for little people.

His need to find them has been haunting his days for some time now. He's prepared to search the entire province or even farther for them. He speaks of the matter with some intensity.

Friends and family, fortunately, are not worried about Petty — at least, not more than they are every year around this time as the Toronto actor-producer brings a full head of steam to another of his Christmas pantomimes.

"I'm calling it *Snow White and the Magnificent Seven*," declares Petty, entirely hale as ever. "I think in this day and age, even though it's a Grimm's fairy tale, I don't want to call it *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*."

By any title, Petty is in need of talented performers under four feet in height, and has already snagged several, including Toronto's Allan Redford.

"He's just a brilliant guy," enthuses Petty. "He's a broker for some of the big houses in town and does show business on the side. He sang well and read well. He's had a lot of film experience."

Patrons visiting the Elgin Theatre for one of the 40 performances of *Snow White and the Magnificent Seven* (playing from Dec. 4 to Jan. 6) may even get a taste of Petty's film experience as well during his English music-hall-styled shenanigans this year.

What's it to be? Yul Brynner references from the western classic *The Magnificent Seven*? A Kurosawa homage celebrating *The Seven Samurai* (on which the Hollywood



From left top: Fred Penner, Ross Petty, Graham Abbey. Bottom: Allan Redford, Melissa Thomson.

western was based)? Perhaps a subtle deconstruction of Walter Lang's deathless 1961 cinematic foray, *Snow White Meets the Three Stooges*?

"We always go off on different tangents," Petty offers demurely.

Consider this year's major tangent: Petty, who played the role of the narrator when he did a musical version of *Snow White* 14 years ago, is this time to be — the evil stepmother.

"It was a tough decision, frankly," says Petty, declining to disclose how many wild horses would have been needed to tear him from the opportunity. "I didn't think there was a role for me."

The truth is that there wouldn't be a Christmas pantomime to mount without him on the stage, so much do his annual turns as the villain of the piece anchor the evening's fun. Petty is still being

regaled by friends with children about his role as Captain Hook in last year's *Peter Pan*.

This time, he's extended that steel manacle of his around the waist of Melissa Thomson (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Miss Saigon*), who will be Snow White, and, of all people, Graham Abbey, the face powder of several King Henrys still visible on his brow from his stellar season at the Stratford Festival this summer.

"No one really knows that he's a musical performer," remarks Petty of his intended Prince.

Sears is again sponsoring the uproar and Ford Canada has come aboard as an associate sponsor. They like Petty's knack for bringing youngsters to see live theatre for the first time, and Petty says he's pretty proud of that, too.

If only Toshiro Mifune had been available.