



ERNEST DOROSZUK/SUN

Sean Cullen (centre, as Guy Endermeer), Elena Juatco (right, as Snow White) and the who's who of Canadian Idol fame.

Idol-izing Petty's panto

'Blissful, over-the-top silliness'

Don't bother trying to figure out whether the chaos theory, the theory of evolution or the theory of intelligent design best describes the way Christmas pantos are built.

One look at *Snow White And The Group of Seven* will be enough to tell you the only possible answer would be "all of the above."

Ross Petty Productions' latest welcome bout of frenetic festive fun, *Snow White* opened at the Elgin Theatre Thursday, where it will run through Jan. 8.

And it is chaos, in the best possible sense, as Petty leans heavily on the festive spirit to bring together one-time rock stars, *Canadian Idol* finalists, iconic comedians and his own version of demented drag to craft what his publicity describes as a 'family musical.'

Which brings us to the whole business of evolution, for clearly, no matter what the poster says, what Petty has wrought is yet another chapter in his ongoing love affair with the panto, the tradition he plucked from the British music hall where it was born and transplanted to Toronto. From there it has evolved into something uniquely Canadian.

In nine previous outings, Petty has recruited stars from the world of theatre, dance, television and even sports to help him out.

This time out, it is clearly pop music and reality TV's turn to shine as ex-rocker Alan Frew of *Glass Tiger* fame joins forces with *Canadian Idol*-ists Elena Juatco, Gary Beals, Billy Klippert and Ryan Malcolm to help Petty and his crew twist the story of *Snow White* into a madcap family adventure, complete with pop tunes.

Which brings us to intelli-

gent design, for while Petty's *Snow White* is a clear example of staged chaos, it is clearly controlled chaos, with director Ted Dykstra keeping a firm, if somewhat fractured, hand on David Finley's story,

Tracey Flye's choreography, Bob Foster's musical direction and an entire cast that is nothing if not enthusiastic.

Juatco is wonderfully cast as Snow White, while Petty himself combines panto's traditional dame and villain in a single character named Queen Celine Poutine, Snow White's evil stepmother (In the process, Petty may have succeeded in doing for drag what Mad Cow Disease did for

hamburger.) Meanwhile, comic Sean Cullen climbs on board and finds a perfect fit as the glittering Guy Endermeer (think about it) and narrator, while Frew and the boys team up with a few others to play the boy band who shelters our heroine from the wrath of the Queen in a home sub-leased from a bunch of dwarfs.

In other casting, Jamie McKnight is wonderfully endearing as the love interest, while Eddie Glen makes the most of the role of the Prince's sad-sack side-kick, turning in a pretty fair audition for the role of dame in future productions, along the way.

And while it may not add up to much if you insist on measuring it against more traditional theatrical fare, and while it occasionally trips over itself in its enthusiasm, one thing is certain: At this time of year, it offers a blissful two hours of over-the-top silliness from which the entire family is likely to get a big bang.

But that's just another theory.



John Coulbourn

STAGE

★★★★½

OUT OF 5
**Snow White
And The Group
Of Seven**

Director: Ted Dykstra
Starring: Ensemble

john.coulbourn@tor.sunpub.com