

# Happily ever after

Ross Petty's excellent Cinderella will make you feel like a kid again

If panto were an Olympic sport, then one suspects Ross Petty has been slowly assembling a gold medal team over the past decade and more.

And, this year, that team has put together what even the most venal French judge would have to judge a gold medal routine.

It's called *Cinderella: The Sillylicious Family Musical* and it opened at the Elgin Theatre Thursday in what is almost certain to be a too-brief run, once the word gets around.

And that word will be "great": From script to direction to casting, this Cinderella may be wearing glass slippers, but the rest of her is pure gold.

The script is courtesy of playwright Chris Earle who, after last year's *Peter Pan* misfire, has finally found the philosopher's stone when it comes to transforming the dross of well-worn fairytales into pure panto fools' gold, stripping the meat off the bones of a well-worn story and padding it out with a mix of songs and silliness that will have 'em rolling in the aisles throughout the holidays.

From a fairy godmother with short-term memory problems to a cootie-driven lass carriage, Earle combines the familiar with the sublimely ridiculous with such a deft touch that it all becomes fresh and new and, best of all, delightful.

Once Earle finished working his magic, Petty then handed it over to director Ted Dykstra, and he, too, seems to have plugged straight into the panto ethos, polishing Earle's script until it shines like a new penny.

To accomplish this, Dykstra



Things get really ugly in *Cinderella: The Sillylicious Family Musical*, when Bertha Von Botox (Ross Petty) and her, uh, "handsome" daughters Plumbum (Dan Chameroy) and Carnivia (Adam Brazier) arrive on the scene. Petty's annual holiday pantomime is on stage at the Elgin Theatre until Jan. 4.

and Petty have assembled a flawless cast and transformed it into an impressive piece of panto machinery.

To carry the love story that sits at the story's heart, they've recruited Paula Brancati as a thoroughly modern Cinderella, opposite Jake Epstein's rocking Prince George, both of whom shine. Perhaps the final testament to their skill is they can hold their own against everything this panto can throw at them.

That would include that aforementioned fairy godmother (winnily played by Patty Sullivan in a stunning professional debut) and Cinderella's loyal and loveable sidekick (played by veteran Eddie Glen), both of whom give performances certain to charm, as do Karen LeBlanc and Laurie Murdock in supporting roles.

But mostly, the silliness comes courtesy of Cinderella's wicked stepmother, the buxom Bertha Von Botox



(Petty himself) and her two strapping daughters, Carnivia (Adam Brazier) and Plumbum (Dan Chameroy) — a trio of thespians who cheerfully remind us at every turn what a key role "drag" plays in the phrase: "What the cat dragged in."

Sporting a front porch that would be the envy of any southern plantation house, Petty is a cloying vision in mephitidaen black and white, with just a touch of purple passion, while Brazier and Cha-

meroy conspire with costume designer Erika Connor to put colour blindness at the top of a lot of Santa Wish Lists.

Happily, their performances are even more fearless than their costumes, with Brazier and Chameroy plumbing the depths of vacuity with all-out verve and leaving it to Petty to prove that, while wife Karen Kain may not be the only one in the family who dances, she's most definitely the only one who dances well.



Left: Paula Brancati makes for a thoroughly modern Cinderella and is able to hold her own against everything the wild pantomime can throw at her. Above: Patty Sullivan makes a stunning professional debut as Forgetful the Fairy Godmother.

Of course, there's lot of audience participation and music, "inspired by" a range of pop hits and, thanks to choreographer Tracey Flye, there's also some pretty spiffy dancing that shows off the chorus to perfection. And, yes, there's even the obligatory nod to corporate sponsors, this year carried to such delicious heights that the panto could become the Super Bowl of must-see Christmas advertising.

Most of all, there's plenty of

Petty in a panto that flirts constantly with theatrical disaster, but never succumbs, soaring to ever-higher heights of Petty-propelled silliness without ever going completely over the top.

Christmas, they tell us, is for kids, and if you ever needed a reminder that, at heart, we are all kids — and occasionally, who of us doesn't? — *Cinderella: The Sillylicious Family Musical* is just the ticket.

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**John Coulbourn**  
STAGE

★★★★★

**Cinderella: The Sillylicious Family Musical**

Elgin Theatre

Director: Ted Dykstra

Starring: The ensemble