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The Wizard Of Oz is Ross Petty Productions' best panto in years

With its tight script, complete with urgent ecological theme, terrific cast and wide range of audience participation, this show is sure to elevate everyone's mood

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Photo by Racheal McCaig

THE WIZARD OF OZ: A TOTO-LY TWISTERED FAMILY MUSICAL by Matt Murray (Ross Petty Productions). At the Elgin Theatre (189 Yonge). Runs to January 5. \$27-\$99. rosspetty.com. See [listing](#). Rating NNNN

Ross Petty Productions' *The Wizard Of Oz* is the company's best panto in years. No, Petty has not returned as the villain and neither has Dan Chameroy as the wacky Plumbum. What the show

does have is a tight, well-written script by **Matt Murray**, **Tracey Flye**'s taut direction and energetic choreography, five fine singer/actors playing Dorothy and her travelling companions and, best of all, **Sara-Jeanne Hosie** as the strongest villain to replace Petty since he retired in 2015.

Murray reimagines the Kansas of the movie as present-day pastel-coloured Ossington Avenue. Thanks to global warming, a tornado sweeps through Toronto and whisks Dorothy and Toto to an eye-poppingly vivid Oz (sets and costumes are by **Cory Sincennes**). The plot is familiar except that instead of Munchkins there are Ozians in charge of making sure Earth has clean air. Meanwhile, the cold-blooded witch Sulphura wants to heat up the Earth with her pollution-making machine.

Hosie plays Sulphura with the same panache that Petty brought to all his villains. She has swagger mixed with a dash of self-mockery and is an excellent singer.

All the leads have strong voices – this is one panto you could enjoy simply as a great song-and-dance revue. As Dorothy, **Camille Eanga-Selenge** is a major talent whose passion while calling out injustice on stage earned her calls of “Go girl!” from the audience. **Matt Nethersole** is an endearing Scarecrow with fantastic dance moves. **Eric Craig** brings out the heartbroken Tin Man's sorrow. **Daniel Williston**'s outer fierceness as the Lion comically collapses at the slightest challenge, yet he, too, is a fine singer.

Michael De Rose plays Plumbum's more sedate relative Sugarbum, a witch whose spells no longer work, but whatever blandness we perceive De Rose shakes off. **Eddie Glen**, now in his 16th Petty panto, plays Sulphura's henchman Randy with priceless comic dissatisfaction.

After too many Petty pantos focused only on boos, Wizard brings back a wider range of audience participation, with characters asking children for advice or for help in rescuing Toto.

Such participation engages kids more in the narrative and, when the show is as full of life as this, it elevates everyone's mood. Don't miss it.

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