

The Big Bad Wolf

★ ★ ★ ★

Sophie Layton (she/her)

A fairytale rock band, 'magic bean' dealers & Hansel equipped with Mace - "That sounds deliciously fun".

Combining fairytale classics with a fresh flair of rock-induced farce, *The Big Bad Wolf* is a manifestation of what the other draft of *Into the Woods* may have been. Complete with a camp fairy, questionable puppetry & a crisis of confidence facing our titular [hero/villain; delete as appropriate], this musical-pantomime-comedy-concert-variety show is a fantastic, family-friendly production that entertains & thrills, punching well above its weight at this year's Fringe Festival.

Complete with an incredible four person cast playing a variety of larger-than-life caricatures of everyone's favourite fairy tale creatures, The Plandits's actor-musician medley strikes the perfect balance of family-friendly comedy, deploying original quips with great comedic timing to have the audience in stitches at every turn (whilst also peppering in one or two more adult euphemisms that land only with the eagle-eared, & dirty minded!). Their original orchestrations & lyrics manage to captivate effortlessly & seem almost too well-done for a Fringe musical, a testament to the cast's abilities both on & off stage.

Their chemistry is electric; four performers whose years of collaboration shines through eloquently to create a magically engaging & camp visual feast that warms the soul. I particularly enjoyed both Grand Fairy Beryl & the titular Wolf's characters; throughout the performance, Beryl's camp, no-nonsense approach to being our collective moral compass, & narrator, is welcoming & puts a smile on your face at every entrance & exit. The skilful way in which their character is written decides to show & not tell at key moments, helping to move the plot along without being bogged down in exposition, something Beryl does with ease & grace throughout.

The Big Bad Wolf's damascene conversion is entertaining & convincing, & watching a previously-one-dimensional character explore a different facet of their being is one that is executed well & characterised perfectly. The blend of sinister monologuing & graceful dance, musical & tender moments help to flesh out a character who could have come across as wooden, but aided by an incredible performance, help to give this grandma-killer a new life on stage.

Much of this production could rightly be called creative & inventive, from the exceptional writing to creative manner in which character development was handled on stage (who knew Red Riding Hood was from the American Mid West?). The musical numbers in particular are incredibly catchy, & with several of them available on streaming platforms, who knows how long the camp fairy & bad/not bad wolf will be stuck in my head!

The final performance of The Plandits's *The Big Bad Wolf* was a celebratory romp through fairy tale books that left no page intact. Receiving a well-deserved standing ovation from the crowd, it was apparent that this show is a hidden gem of this year's festival, particularly for younger audiences. As we all chanted "Bring back the pig!", I can only hope that this message is taken to heart, & that this is not the final time that *The Big Bad Wolf* is to grace our stages.