

Theatre review: Cinderella, Lyceum Theatre (***)



Scottish actor and playwright Johnny McKnight is a busy man this Christmas. He's directing and starring in his own panto *Aganeza Scrooge* at Glasgow's Tron theatre, and there's a revival of his *Cinderella* at Stirling's MacRobert. And he's also unveiled a brand new musical version of *Cinderella* at Edinburgh's Lyceum, directed by the theatre's artistic director Mark Thomson. The show takes a strikingly fresh and often dark look at the well-loved story, yet Thomson's admittedly colourful, energetic production doesn't seem to know whether it's a panto or a play.

Remembering Charles Perrault's original 17th-century telling of the tale, McKnight relocates the action to Paris – although in the end the setting hardly matters (and after the opening is rarely mentioned). Cinders is our usual put-upon but feisty waif with a heart of gold, played with charm by Julie Heatherill. But her handsome prince – a strutting Martin McCormick – is cable TV reality star Prince Pierre, relentlessly pursued by a camera crew and desperate for ratings even if it means marrying someone he doesn't love.

There's a deliciously sinister side to McKnight's reimagining of the tale. It's a bold move to open the show with little Cinders throwing her mother's ashes to the wind, and his wicked stepmother – a gleefully sadistic Jayne McKenna – is a menacing supernatural creature, unpredictable and cruel, who threatens death to Cinders's bewitched father. The ugly sisters become lippy teen-speak vixens, played with relish and an astonishing sense of timing by Jo Freer and Nicola Roy, although their 'OMG!'s and 'Newsflash!'s begin to wear slightly by the second half.



Alan Penman's songs do their job (but sometimes seem to be trying a bit too hard to be by Sondheim), and Thomson's bold, bright production keeps things whizzing along in thoroughly entertaining fashion. But there's the unavoidable sense that the show doesn't really honour its contract with the audience. There's no chance of joining in with any panto fun, but despite the enjoyable aspects of McKnight's rethinking, the production lacks the psychological depth that we'd expect from a straight fairytale drama. In trying to be a bit of both, it ends up being neither.

The highlight of the evening, though, is the touching physical delivery by Spencer Charles Noll as the mute Boy (or Buttons, in other words), who expresses his love for Cinders through some remarkably poignant expressions and eloquent movements. It's just a shame that with the show's over-abundance of themes jostling for attention, his character doesn't get more time in the spotlight.

[Cinderella](#) continues at the [Lyceum Theatre](#) until 29 December