

Crowds roll up for Goldilocks with a circus twist

Allan Stewart has admitted in interviews that he originally did not wish to appear in pantomime but, 44 years after he first appeared in a seasonal stage show, he's back.

Stewart (pictured with the cast) is now one of Scotland's longest serving panto stars. This, incidentally, is the Glasgow-born entertainers 22nd at the King's Theatre.

Therefore, he knows the art inside out and the 69-year-old has again teamed-up with Andy Gray and Grant Stott.

The trio have produced winning combinations in previous years and their charisma and chemistry has meant audiences have poured in once again.

Consistency rules in casting for this show, but this Goldilocks and The Three Bears is, however, not traditional.

Yes, the innuendo lives on. So do the shout-outs and community singing. Ad-libs break out regularly, along with local jokes.

One of the principals, well-known broadcaster, Grant Stott, supports the Hibernian FC and the current perilous league position of their rivals, Heart of Midlothian, is the platform for more than a few gags. Hearts fans of delicate disposition cover your ears.

There are also daft ditties and explosions of wind but, saying that, everything is geared to entertain tastefully even if the touchy subject of circus with caged animals or without is

mentioned during the early part of the show.

Stewart's writing ability – he co-wrote the show with Alan McHugh – and comic timing, honed from more than five decades treading the boards, is pivotal. He plays madcap Dame May McReekie.

Traditionalists will say: "What about the original story." Well, it is there, but this show goes, as they say, off the original script.

And, you know, it works. The show is billed "The Greatest Panto on Earth", a reference to the main theme of a struggling circus.

The plot also features evil Baron Von Vinkelbottom, bent on destroying his rivals.

The Baron is admirably played by Stott, his rich, dark voice cutting through the theatre as he attempts mischief. The audience love giving him stick and Stott has his work cut out to stop. He is also King's veteran as this is his 20th consecutive panto at the theatre.

Opposing him is Andy Gray, thankfully on the mend after a serious illness. They are great friends off stage but sharp talking adversaries in front of the audience who, on the day we visited, lapped up the two hours of entertainment.

The word entertainment is appropriate as, built into the piece, are showstopping circus acts.

The Great Juggling Alfio mesmerised onlookers with his dexterity with hats and balls and the four Berserk Riders – who performed inside a giant globe – had the audience on the edge of their seats as they opened the throttle on their stunning cameo.

Goldilocks and the Three Bears do appear. Goldilocks is played by Gillian Parkhouse, back at the King's for a third season.

Her stage presence and voice were highlights.

Jordan Young fitted the part of Joey, the Clown, like a glove and his fast-talking summation of the panto story line was a feature along with his high wire walk. This is a big change from his day jobs, pretending to be a gangster in BBC Scotland's River City and a policeman in Scot Squad.

The King's Theatre Orchestra kept this slick show at high tempo and choreographer Karen Martin deserves a mention as do the sound and lighting staff.

Costumes were stunning and the sets provided an ideal backdrop for a thoroughly entertaining show which continues to run at the King's until January 19.

Go with an open mind and you will not be disappointed.