Programme Notes for Shrek the Musical

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS SHOW STARTS AT THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE AT 7.00 PM.

This audio described performance is brought to you by Sightlines and the Grand Opera House. The describers are Amy Stewert and Marie Abbott.

The story of SHREK! by William Steig, was first published in 1990. In 2001 it was released as an animated film by Dreamworks, and won an Oscar. It was followed by three more films. In December 2008, Shrek the Musical first opened in Broadway.

It has become a modern classic fairy tale.

The music is played live in the show, by an orchestra located in front of the stage.

The Set

The sets for Shrek the Musical are all based on the pictures you would find in a child’s picture book – exaggerated, stereotypical images. Like in a picture book, everything is flat and one dimensional. So where there is grass, trees or a wall, it is as though they have been cut out from a big picture book and stood upright on the stage.

Right at the start, the theatre curtains are a rich, verdant green and the edges are embellished with thick trailing ropes of leaves like stalks of a beanstalk. When the curtains open there is a huge book, about twice the height of a man, in the centre of the stage. It has a green cover that looks like leather, emblazoned on the front with a big green letter ‘S’. The ‘S’ has two stalks protruding out the top, like the strange ears of an ogre.

When the cover of the book opens the left side page has the words ‘Once upon a time’ printed in a gothic style. The right hand side of the book has the pages cut out to form a frame, a little stage within a stage onto which the actors step as they are introduced.

When the book is removed we are in Shrek’s swamp. It is very green – the floor is green, the sky is green, there are clumps of green grass and thick green vines overhead. In the middle of the stage is the door to Shrek’s house. There are two thick tree trunks on either side of a door made of wooden planks. The planks are broken unevenly at the top, and a sign saying ‘Go Away’ hangs off a nail in the middle. Later, bright pink and yellow flowers pop out around the door frame. A big orangey sun shines in the background. As the day progresses the sky turns a dark blue. Later, when Shrek is lost in the swamp, it is darker green, and the trees are thick and dense.

In the next scene we are inside Farquaad’s torture chamber. Here the backdrop appears to be a room with walls of solid grey bricks with flaming torches in sconces on the walls. There are two very solid, heavy doors in the centre with the letter ‘f’ carved into the wood.

Donkey and Shrek arrive in Duloc and stop outside the entrance to Lord Farquaad’s castle. The painted backdrop for this is a massive, brick built fortress, very grey, solid and imposing. There are two very tall towers to the left and right, each with a single narrow window at the top. Two slightly smaller, solid columns sit to the left and right of the entrance, a set of heavy wooden doors. Above the doors is a shield with the letter ‘f’ emblazoned on it. Four very neat, immaculately trimmed green trees sit on either side of the door. In the blue sky above puffy white clouds flit past.

When Farquaad is announced the fortress backdrop lifts away and behind it is the courtyard and the walls of Farquaad’s castle. To the far left and right are two narrow columns, each with a flag flying from it. Closer to the centre are two more columns, each with a long banner hanging down with the letter ‘f’ in gold. These two columns are linked by ramparts the width of the arched entrance door.

The tower where Princess Fiona is imprisoned is a classic fairy tale image. A pointed stone turret with a narrow window sits on top of a wider room still high in the clouds. This room has a wide window and a balcony upon which Fiona stands to read her books. The balcony has filigree metal work, finishing in a pretty heart detail right in the middle. The whole tower is covered in climbing tendrils of thick plants. High in the sky, behind the top of the tower is an orange sun, and puffy white clouds are all around the high balcony. The colour of the sky changes during this sequence, from pink at first to purple and then red.

On the way to the fiery stronghold of the dragon, Shrek and Donkey walk together as the background behind them scrolls through different scenery. Some of it is rolling pastures and green fields and later the hot, dry svelte of Africa.

It changes slowly on the approach to the fiery Dragon’s keep, getting darker as Shrek and Donkey climb a small stair onto the rickety rope bridge. The bridge is narrow, just wide enough for one person. It has frayed ropes and wooden slats, through which come draughts of steam from below. The sky is fiery red, with puffs of dry ice lit red like hot lava steam.

Shrek and Donkey enter the dragon’s keep into her dungeon. It’s dark and close at first and then opens up when we see the four captured knights held in stocks. They stand upright with their heads and hands locked in a tight wooden brace. The scene is all dark and smoky with black and white bare brick glimpsed behind, and barred windows high above.

Next we visit Fiona’s room in the dragon’s keep. The high tower is visible in the background, outlined against the bare bricks of the keep. The bed is a wooden box or casket with a thin mattress and pillow on top.

Later, outside the keep, Fiona, Shrek and Donkey are back in the woods. Now the space is more open. To the left and right angled struts curve out onto the stage, like the trunks of big, green trees. In the background, behind a lattice of creepers, is a huge, orange sun in a blue sky that darkens as the scene progresses. There are tall, rugged cliffs far away, and a web of thick, uneven tendrils overlays the mountains and the sun.

Later, Shrek and Donkey talk alone. They are closer to the cliffs which now loom in the background. Rising behind the cliffs is a massive full moon in a dark sky with pin pricks of starlight.

In the second act the colours are all brighter and lighter, and the woods are more open and airy. The cabin that Fiona finds is another story book classic. It has a high pitched roof and is built from small cobble stones and thick wooden beams. The image of the cabin is printed onto a thin, translucent gauze that can be lit so we can see Fiona inside the cabin.

The cathedral has a raised altar in the middle of a shiny, polished floor. Looming above everything at the back of the stage is a huge, arched, leaded glass window. At the peak of the arch is a circle of leaded glass with a ring of stars around the outside and a big five pointed star in the centre of the circle.

The final scene is back in Shrek’s swamp.

**CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES**

There is a large cast of characters, with twenty-five actors who sing, dance and perform in the show.

The four lead solo actors play the characters SHREK, Princess Fiona, Lord Farquaad and the Donkey. The other actors all play more than one character, like soldiers, fairy-tale characters and puppeteers. Four are solely dancers.

SHREK, the friendly Ogre hero is played by Dean Chisnall. Shrek has green skin and is built up to be larger than life, about 7 feet tall. His head is bald and his face round, with a large nose and chin. His two ears, shaped like small trumpets, sit out like antennae on each side of his head. He wears a knee length light brown robe, made of rough woven fabric, with long sleeves, and a short crocodile-skin waistcoat. A wide leather belt sits below his large belly, and his very bowed legs are clad in red and blue tartan trousers. Heavy brown laced boots complete his outfit. Shrek likes to scare people, but not harm them.

PRINCESS FIONA is played by Faye Brookes. She is slim, with a heart–shaped face, wide smile and expressive eyes. Her red wavy hair is worn in a single thick plait which hangs down her back. A glittering small tiara sits neatly on her head, and a string of diamonds adorns her elegant neck. She wears a full length dress made of green velvet dress, with an overall small print. The neckline is scooped, and the sleeves are long and close-fitting. Fiona also wears a neat dark green velvet waistcoat, laced at the front. Her shoes are green, with a small heel.

The part of LORD FARQUAAD is played by Gerard Carey. Farquaad is youthful, with shoulder –length thick black hair, dark eyebrows and has a clean shaven face. This character, Lord Farquaad, initially appears to be of small stature, but this is quickly recognised as an illusion, as the actor performs in costume on his knees, with a pair of thin short legs attached from his waist down. He wears a blue and red tunic, with diamond shaped panels at the top, and a striped skirt, worn over yellow striped leggings and red leather boots with a blue cuff. The tunic sleeves have yellow and blue slashed panels and blue gauntlet gloves. He has a red and blue solid circular hat, and a full trailing cloak, also patterned with diamond shapes. His outfit is adorned all over with glittering beads and sequins that reflect the lights as he moves around. He also appears in a similar red and gold patterned tunic, with a long matching cloak.

The DONKEY is played by Idriss Kargbo. The Donkey appears in a close-fitting body costume of textured grey fabric, with padded thighs and arms, and large grey hooves on his hands and feet. The suit is darker grey from the knees down. His hair is black and bushy and a mane made of short black fabric loops runs from his head right down his neck and along his spine, ending in a tail. Two large pale grey ears sit firmly upright on his head.

There are thirteen fairy tale characters who appear as a group in the show.

Other characters in order of appearance:

MAMA OGRE, Shrek’s mother, is played by Jenny O’Leary. She is large, green skinned and her antenna-like ears peek through her brown hair. She wears a long tweed patched skirt and brown blouse. She also plays MAMA BEAR (one of the fairy-tale characters) when she wears a brown bear suit, skirt and top, with woolly hat, bear ears and a black bears nose.

PAPA OGRE is played by Leo Roberts. He is very tall, and heavily built, and wears baggy trousers and a loose brown tunic. He has dark hair, green skin and trumpet shaped ears, like Shrek. He also plays PAPA BEAR , dressed in a brown woolly coat worn over brown woolly trousers, and with a woolly hat, bear ears and a woolly beard. He also plays a KNIGHT.

YOUNG SHREK is played by Hannah Jamison, wearing a smaller version of Shrek’s outfit. The QUEEN is played by Jennifer Caldwell. She wears a long shimmering blue velvet gown and a gold crown. She later appears as the WICKED WITCH and as one of the THREE BLIND MICE,( from the fairy-tale/ nursery rhyme characters.) As the witch she appears in an outfit of a black net full skirt, dotted with a gilt spiders web markings,a bright orange bodice, black net gloves, long black net cape and multi-coloured pointy witches hat. She carries a colourful broomstick. The THREE BLIND MICE are three blond haired women singers, dressed identically in short pink silky evening dresses, white fur jackets, pink tights and white shoes. They wear large white mouse ears, black sunglasses and carry white canes.

The KING is played by Neil Moors. He appears in a knee length purple velvet robe, and wears a large crown. He also plays the WOLF, dressed in a full length blue padded dressing gown, with a lace collar, worn over his wolfskin suit. He wears a wolfskin hat, with ears. Neil also plays THELONIUS one of the KNIGHTS.

A group of VILLAGERS appear, all dressed in simple similar outfits, with long skirts or dresses for the women, with tunics , trousers and boots for the men- all in shades of brown or dull orange.

Steffan Harri plays the CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS. He wears the shining metal armour of a knight, with a full breast-plate, shoulder panels, cod-piece and armour on arms, thighs and lower legs. On his head he wears a circular, flat-topped headpiece. He carries a very long sword. ( This outfit is basically the same for all the Knights and Guards) Steffan also plays one of the THREE LITTLE PIGS. Each of the Little Pigs is a huge character, with full padded stomachs, behinds and legs. Each wears a large pigs nose, ears, feet and curly tails. They are all dressed in various shades of pink, with pink stripped trousers, shirts and patterned jumpers.

PINOCCHIO is played by Will Halswell. Pinocchio is a wooden puppet, with a long wooden nose, and he wears short blue trousers, a white shirt, yellow leggings, red shoes and a straw hat. Will also plays a GUARD and is a puppeteer for the Dragon.

RED RIDING HOOD is played by Bronte Barbe. She is all in red- from her bright scarlet red curly hair, to her short red silky dress and cape, and red dancing shoes.Bronte also plays one of the BLIND MICE.

The FAIRY GODMOTHER is played by Candace Furbert. The Fairy Godmother wears a calf-length lilac dress, with a full circular ruffled skirt and tight bodice, with fairy wings attached. She has grey laced up boots. Her silver grey hair is piled up on her head into a cone shape and she carries a purple wand. Candace is also the voice of the DRAGON.

Mia Lincoln plays the part of the UGLY DUCKLING. She wears a fluffy padded outfit, in mottled brown and grey with stripped leggings, and large webbed orange feet. On her head she wears a fluffy hood, with an orange beak as a cap. She also plays one of the BLIND MICE.

PETER PAN is played by Rory Maguire. Peter Pan is dressed in a short tunic made from large green leaves, worn over green tights. He has thick vivid blue hair, worn swept back off his face. He carries a lantern. Rory also plays a GUARD and is a puppeteer for the Dragon.

BABY BEAR is played by Georgina Parkinson. She wears a brown furry bear suit, with trousers, long woolly socks, a jumper and scarf, and a hat with bear ears and a black nose. Georgina also plays the TEEN Princess Fiona, and is dressed in a green dress identical to that worn by the adult Fiona.

The part of the SUGAR PLUM FAIRY is played by Nikki Bentley. This fairy is dressed in a ballet tutu, with a stiff pink sparkly net skirt, a pink laced bodice and a pair of fairy wings. Her blond hair is piled high on her head, and she carries a pink wand.

RYAN REID plays one of the LITTLE PIGS, dressed in pink. He also plays the BISHOP , in the cathedral scene, wearing a golden robe and bishops mitre hat. He is also a dragon puppeteer.

Several of the cast play the part of DULOC DANCERS , citizens of Duloc, dressed in vivid red and blue soft plastic outfits. These outfits consist of short flared knee length skirts with contrasting tops- red skirt/blue top or blue skirt/red top worn with red or blue plastic tights and shoes. The male and female dancers also wear red or blue kneepads and yellow plastic hair caps.

YOUNGEST FIONA is played by Georgina Bayliss, dressed in a green gown like the adult Fiona. Catherine Lee plays the part of a Dwarf.

The PIED PIPER is played by James Winter. He wears a soft brown tunic, edged with yellow trim, over a yellow shirt and brown trousers tucked into his boots. He wears a yellow cap, with a feather in it, and a peak that covers his eyes. He also plus the part of a KNIGHT and a GUARD.

The DRAGON is a key beautiful character in the show. The dragon is very large, and held aloft on tall rods by 4 puppeteers. The body and tail is built with a light flexible frame which allows it to walk, to bend and turn and swoop across the stage. The Dragon has wings that can be extended, and rigid scales along its spine and tail. The head is very large, with small horns and a wide mouth that opens to reveal sharp white teeth. Its large yellow eyes have a slit pupil and moveable eyelids with long lashes, that can open and close expressively. The dragon is inflated slightly and floats . Its body is covered in a billowy silky fabric with pink scales all over, and with golden scales on its underbelly. As the lighting changes colour, the dragon appears to become green or red.