

The Little Mermaid – Ballet Theatre of Queensland

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Now in its 77th year as Queensland's Premier Youth Ballet Company, Ballet Theatre of Queensland has adapted the classic Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale and blended it with the charm of Walt Disney's animated film to bring *The Little Mermaid* to Brisbane this summer holidays.

For those who haven't seen the movie for a while, the mermaid Ariel lives under the sea with her five sisters her grandmother and her father the Sea King. When Ariel turns 15 she is permitted to swim to the surface, where she sees a handsome prince on a ship and instantly falls in love. When a great storm hits, the prince falls overboard and Ariel saves him from drowning and takes him ashore. Longing to be part of the prince's world, Ariel visits the Sea Witch and makes a deal to swap her beautiful singing voice for human legs.

With choreography by Artistic Director Timothy Brown, the ballet was a delight to watch and the contrasting scenes of 'under the sea' and 'in the prince's court', gave greater scope for variety in dance style, costuming, and set design.

Rozina Suliman (set designer) did a brilliant job with the huge 3D looking set piece for the royal court, and the long flanks of blue material manipulated by the dancers to symbolise the rolling seas was a nice touch. Lighting design by Andrew Meadows did well to help create the atmosphere of the stormy seas, the sunny skies, and the watery sea world beneath.

The costuming by Carmel Wenck was stunning. Various sea creatures created a kaleidoscope of colour onstage, with the most exquisite piece of costuming being the little mermaid's opalesque scaled costume; the 'tail' part easily came off when she transformed into a human and grew legs.

The recorded music was compiled from classical composers including Leo Delibes, Anton Rubinstein, Johann Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Franz Schubert, Jean Sibelius, George Gershwin, Holger Paulli, Ronald Binge and Pyotr Tchaikovsky. Although it would be nice to have more updated music, or even some new music to give the ballet a contemporary facelift, it is most

likely due to the producer's purse strings and the easy access to copyright free music that dates many children's ballet productions.

With only two weeks of intensive rehearsals during the first week of the September school holidays and the week before the performances in January, the talented young cast was impressive and the quality of their training throughout the year is obvious.

There were a number of stand-out performances. Alicia Townsend was perfectly cast as The Little Mermaid; she was graceful and sweet and just lovely to watch throughout. Liam Geck who played the prince was also impressive with his leaps and general command of the stage. However Lucy Christodoulou, who played Carman Maracas, shone brightest of all. Armed with a pair of maracas that she danced with most of the time, she was vibrant, funny, and exuded joy whenever she was onstage. Christodoulou looked like she was having great fun up there and came across as a natural entertainer.

Performances of *The Little Mermaid*, ran from Wednesday 22-25 January 2014 at the Conservatorium Theatre, Griffith University South Bank Campus in Brisbane.