

## New take on Oz thrills all ages

**Mark Pavilons**

?Somewhere over the rainbow,  
Skies are blue.  
And the dreams that you dare to dream,  
Really do come true.?



The Wizard of Oz is one of those stories ??retold countless times over the last 113 years in various forms.

Most of us are familiar and enamored with the 1939 classic movie, starring Judy Garland, Ray Bolger (Scarecrow), Jack Haley (Tin Man), Bert Larh (Cowardly Lion), Frank Morgan (Wizard) and Margaret Hamilton (Wicked Witch). These are iconic characters and anyone following in their footsteps has some mighty big shoes to fill. The film is a cornerstone of North American popular culture and catch phrases from the flick are part of our everyday vocabulary.

Like most, I?watched it growing up, and then put it on the backburner. When our first-born Lexie began to grow and blossom, we watched it with her on VHS and she was immediately taken by this oldie, but goodie. She simply couldn't get enough and as children are apt to do, watched it over and over and over. We went through two VHS tapes and we're now on our second DVD copy of the film. Lexie also went out for Halloween when she was five, dressed as Dorothy (what little girl hasn't?)

At the time, I found it really neat that a young child would be so taken by such an old story, given the technology available in today's films. But, in retrospect, the costumes and special effects were quite good for its time. Its wholesome theme has all the ingredients of an exciting drama. And let's not forget the music, and award-winning original song (Over the Rainbow).

Frank L. Baum's story is timeless ??it's 113 years old and going strong.

I thought it only fitting to take Lex to see Andrew Lloyd Webber's production of The Wizard of Oz, which continues to sell out in Toronto's Mirvish Theatre.

This legendary tale is totally reconceived for the Toronto stage. While it retains its original story and flavour, this upbeat, modern interpretation is appealing for all ages and includes some new songs by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber.

The lead role of Dorothy went to Danielle Wade, via the 16-episode CBC?reality show Over the Rainbow. The 20-year-old from La Salle, Ontario, recently completed her second year at the University of Windsor, where she studies acting. She has more than 10 years of vocal training and recently played Elle Woods in Legally Blonde ? The Musical, Cinderella in Into The Woods and was part of the cast in Carner & Gregor's Barely Legal Showtune Extravaganza in New York City.

The Over the Rainbow competition also featured Nobleton native Sarah Forestieri, who made it to the top 20.

She's a crowd-pleaser to be sure and while it may be tempting to overplay the part, Dorothy's appeal lies in her youthful naivete. She also doesn't overpower her co-stars.

Gemini Award winner Cedric Smith drew an extended round of applause for his portrayal of the Wizard and Professor Marvel. His stage and TV experience are brought to bear. His take is a bit more refined than the original and his mannerisms are spot on.

Lisa Horner (Miss Gulch, Wicked Witch of the West)?commands attention every moment she's on stage. She also has an extensive

stage, film and TV resume and you may know her as the 'start the car' spouse from the humorous Ikea commercial.

With a long list of stage roles to their credit, the main cast is bolstered by the trio of Mike Jackson (Tim Man), Lee MacDougall (Lion) and Jamie McKnight (Scarecrow). While it may take a bit to get used to a younger, more creative team in these classic roles, they add flavour and humour to increase the audience appeal. Their timing was perfect and it's obvious they truly enjoy their roles.

Robin Evan Willis (Glinda) and her show-stopping gown created some wide eyes among the youngsters.

Just as the original made good use of simple yet vibrant scenic backdrops, this production makes excellent use of the small stage.

Projection screens and very creative use of the witch's castle make the action flow effortlessly and you almost forget about the technical details of moving things around stage.

The flying monkey costumes were amazing, with an added touch of gruesome. The system used to send them aloft worked very well.

If you're a fan of the Wizard of Oz, you can't help but be captivated by a live version of this magical story.

The orchestra members, too, had a daunting task in making the score sound fresh and invigorating. They did not disappoint.

The young ensemble cast, who played Emerald City residents and castle guards, provided a nice new twist of song and dance, showing off their skills. It was very pleasing to watch this phenomenal choreography unwind.

This is a must-see for any theatre fan. It's ideal as a family outing. Treat the kids before school lets out for the summer!