

SHARON MICHELS enjoyed this new musical with me at the Riverside Studios. She writes:

CARNIVAL OF THE ANIMALS at the Riverside Studios had a too short, limited run of only 14 performances but given the quality of this new family musical I am sure it will and certainly ought to return to a bigger venue and for longer. This delightful musical is well worth seeing when it comes round again.

Based on the music of Camille Saint- Saens, Carnival of the Animals, the performance of the animals opens with Mademoiselle Parfait (Anita Dobson) inviting the audience into the small Paris Square with her pronounced and seductive French accent. She explains how the animals, in harmony with humans, are to put on their magnificent show. She is not, however, the person she purports to be and her sinister motives towards the animals are eventually revealed.

It is indeed clear that the animals' performance has lost its soul and zest. The Lion, Henri (Jacob Chapman) now only cares to eat; the Ass (Stephen Webb) is consumed with jealousy and cannot concentrate and Emilie (Claire Machin), the hugely talented elephant cannot remember her words nor steps. Even Cygnet (Bronte Barbe) the leader of the troupe has lost all confidence and is desperate. A turnaround in fortunes begins when Shake (Liam Doyle) the Chimpanzee and his gang persuade the group to allow them to join the performance.

This is a toe tapping, lively and very entertaining production. The cast is strong as are the lyrics and dancing. Composer Gavin Green reworks the music well and there is skilful direction from Thom Southerland. With an excellent and extremely funny performance from the star, Anita Dobson, and a hard-working and talented cast, this show will not fail to please.

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