

# Style and substance as ballet theatre turns on the laughs

*Rock-a-Tutu* – which merges great rock music with classical ballet and thrilling contemporary dance, would be right up there on the scale of Dodgy Concepts – were it not for the fact that this show comes from the pen of Ian von Memerty. You know – *A Handful of Keys*, *Captain Entertainment* and *Big Band Blast*.

In short, it is in the safest hands in the business with a signature of style and infallible good taste. And there is no shortage of style in this latest South African Ballet Theatre production, but there are the added ingredients of humour and buffoonery, which add up to ripping good fun.

Von Memerty uses the fairytale as the vehicle for all this

**Rock-a-Tutu**  
directed by Ian von Memerty  
review: Maxine Denys

leaping and laughing, and a narrator guides us through a mixture of traditional tales – *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Red Riding Hood* and *Rapunzel*.

These characters are all swept up in each other's shenanigans. Von Memerty knows just where that child button lurks in all of us, and yet the whole narrative is cast in tongue-in-cheek adult terms. It works.

The momentum of the work is maintained by the narrator, energetically performed by soapie-heart-throb Carl Beukes.



**Glamour:** Angela Malan as Cleo, Queen of Denial

He brings just the right mix of youthful wonder and his own personal nuance of relentless pun and *double entendre*.

If you think we are talking

about a pantomime here, let us get to the dancing. The choreography draws extensively on the grand heritage of humorous ballet. On close examination, amid the tears of laughter, one will identify references to Ronald Hynd's *Rosalinda* and *Papillon*.

There are also *pas de deux* derived from sequences of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Other dance forms emerge as the mood and music suggest, including choreographic responses to rap, hip-hop and jazz. The dancers embrace all these challenges with seamless ease and confidence – a testimony to the validity of sound dance grounding.

Angela Malan, prima ballerina turned prima kugel as Cleo, the Queen of Denial, steals the

show; she has never seemed more relaxed.

With her usual perfectionist Odette/Odile demeanour completely disguised, she romps through the evening. Her colleague, the usually intense and meditative Burnise Silvius, is successfully cast as Princess Rose, a pouty teenager.

She, too, is able to fling off her classical mantle to boogie with the best of them.

Ian MacDonald's return to the stage is an exceptionally welcome one and in his "rocker" attire he sets the tone of the ballet in his role as Shaggy the Wolf.

The seduction scene with Granny Wanda (a suitably butch old gal, Chloé Grové), was another highlight, and his striptease show had females in the audi-

ence fainting.

Newcomer Guy Wheatstone in his debut as Jeremiah Forest, the other male lead, makes a noble effort in this arduous role. He is a promising young fellow and one to look out for.

The technically skillful Shannon Glover debuts as Red the Hood and is a treat; she teams up with Granny and they form a daunting duo, repelling evil in its many incarnations.

The glorious vocals of Nelda Jansen van Rensburg and Wafeeq Saffodien were vital to the evening's success. Both *Idols* finalists, each has developed a consummate command of the classic rock genre.

□ *The season ends on December 14*

