

Practically perfect!



For details see marypoppins onstage.co.uk

The show is currently booking until July 2022



Petula Clark as The Bird Woman



Charlie Stemp as Bert



Now playing at the West End's Prince Edward Theatre, everyone's favourite nanny is back...

Words: **Darren Calpin** Photos: **Johan Persson and Darren Calpin**

THE LADY SITTING to my left is crying. Not full-on blubbing mind, just a few wee tears. Why? Well, because Bert the chimney sweep has just pulled in Mary Poppins on the end of his kite. The sell-out audience in London's Prince Edward Theatre is equally moved, clapping and whooping with delight as everyone's favourite flying nanny glides gracefully down to the stage to kick off the second half of Mary Poppins, the multi award-winning musical created

by Disney and Cameron Mackintosh. Suffice to say, the simplistic story – magic nanny appears out of nowhere to flirt with chimney sweeps and bring a family closer together – is irresistible. As with the classic Disney film, much of this adaption's initial charm is visual, with Bob Crowley's innovative set designs grabbing your attention right from the get-go. The Banks' family home, ostensibly the tale's principal arena, is nothing less than an enchanting pop-up dolls

house, complete with huge sides that open up to reveal the hall and staircase. This is complemented by a drop down stucco-fronted attic that's the children's bedroom, and a chimney-topped rooftop cresting before an evocative, idealised cityscape of Edwardian London. The full-on technicolour backdrops that accompany some of the big

song-and-dance numbers are sensational too, skillfully evoking the look and feel of the animated sequences that won Disney's much-loved film a Best Visual Effects Oscar in 1965.

STAR CAST

The principal cast are every bit as absorbing as the dazzling sets. Joseph Millson and Amy Griffiths do a gosh-darn fine job of alternating comedy and despair as Mr and Mrs Banks, while the legendary Petula Clark makes hearts flutter every time she comes on to sing 'Feed the Birds'. Though it may well be the Banks family that drives the narrative of this endearing tale, there's no doubting who the show's de facto stars are. Zizi

Strallen is stellar as the mysterious Mary, a transfixing image of prissiness who delivers her "spit-spots" with infectious panache and glides about the stage like she's on skates. Her ability to look so calm and measured while hovering 40-feet aloft with nothing but an avian-topped broly and some discreet wires for company is very impressive, too.

The ever-convivial Bert, played by the ever-convivial Charlie Stemp, illuminates as well. Watching him tap dance horizontally up the walls of the proscenium, and then continue to dance upside down on its arch during the rip-roaring showstopper that is 'Step in Time' is definitely – and literally – one of the high points of the show. Of course, those classic

Sherman Brothers' songs sound as good as ever, with the likes of 'Jolly Holiday', 'Let's Go Fly a Kite' and 'Supercali...' helping to make the medicine go down in the most delightful way.

This was my daughter Ellie's first ever outing to a West End show and she was utterly spellbound by the magical dancing mops, captivating sets and irresistible song-and-dance numbers. Once she'd recovered from watching Mary make her triumphant final flypast over the heads of open-mouthed audience members, I asked her what word she'd use to describe Mary Poppins. "Magic!" she replied. The lady sitting to my left, her red eyes wet with tears, turned to us and nodded profusely. **CTV**



Ellie enjoys her first West End outing