

CINDERELLA

The Mercury Theatre, Colchester

Yet again Pat Trueman and Fine Time Fontayne have co-written a pantomime for the Mercury, directed by Fontayne, and in some ways this is their most impressive creation so far.

There are plenty of original twists on old gags, with the Ugly Sisters' weak-bladdered poodles being a particularly good wheeze. The most breathtaking moment is the dramatic transformation scene in which Cinders finally reappears in fabulous wig and silver gown in a flying coach pulled by winged horses.

Picture-book sets and black-and-silver ball costumes, from designer Chris Crosswell and team, are enthralling, and it is great to welcome back popular Dame Peter Shorey as one of the outrageous sisters. Roger Delves-Broughton partners him amusingly, but is dressed too much like a man at the ball scene, which also loses magic but gains street cred with its line dancing.

As Cinders, Julia Farino is a tiny enchantress, while Buttons (David Beckford) is endearing and comical. Tim Treslove is astoundingly rubber-limbed as accident-prone Baron Hardup, Sandra Hunt most commanding as the Fairy Godmother and a dashing duo of Prince Charming and Dandini comes from Jemima Price and Bryonie Pritchard.

The Chorus, including some superb children, perform David Samuel's exciting choreography with zest and let's hear it for the boys in the pit, Andrew Sterling, Malcolm Woodward and musical director Graeme Du Fresne.