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Lions leap at Toora



Tooraweenah's very own Rafiki (Breanna Damm), Zazu (Heidi Ferguson), Timon (Grace Peart) and Pumbaa (Teagan Watt). Photo supplied. See more photos on Page 13.

Take 28 energetic, enthusiastic, cooperative and confident kids; a bare handful of talented teachers; weeks of hard work and an audience gathered in goodwill - and magic happens.

The magic of live theatre on a tiny stage that becomes the Pride Lands, in a packed village hall that becomes the African Savannah and you have a performance that becomes 'unforgettable'.

So it was with Tooraweenah Public School's stunning production of 'The Lion King' on Thursday, November 5.

With previous entertaining productions behind them, the cast and crew used all their experience to produce a seamless show that held the audience spellbound.

Word perfect, with clear, well-timed delivery, musically in tune, responsive to the changing moods of the story, the children's professionalism was a testament to the dedication of the staff and parents who played a huge role in the success of the production.

The specialised lion, zebra, elephant, hornbill, meerkat, warhog and hyena headresses added to the authenticity and to the palpable joy of the animal inside each one.

The ensemble of animals of the Pride Lands, students from Kindergarten to mid-primary, carried out their supporting roles with practised ease and ability. Appearing and disappearing soundlessly on and off the stage as required, they backed the magnificent vocal numbers that carry the story as clearly as the dialogue.

Principals and ensemble alike slipped out of their real-life identities and became the characters they portrayed, taking the audience along in a state of willing belief.

Rafiki, imposing in native African regalia and tall feather headress, stood benevolently on Pride Rock, observing the development of the danger surrounding Simba.

It is Rafiki's judgment and faith in the authority of the 'Circle of Life' that eventually persuades Simba to take his rightful place as the king of the Pride Lands.

Mufasa, straight and noble as king, just but firm as father, assumed his role with dignity, witnessing in his bearing and speech the royal lineage that was to pass to his son in the 'circle of life'. Simba was played convincingly by three students to show both his physical maturity and his progressive moral awareness. His despair is finally relieved only by the love of his childhood friend, Nala, and the wisdom of the shaman, Rafiki.

Scar, ever smooth, persuasive and plausible, conveyed the evil of his intentions to all but his naïve nephew, Simba. Falling for Scar's ambitious and devious plot, the adventurous young Simba loses his innocence and with it his self-respect, reinstated much later by Nala and Rafiki.

Zazu, major domo of awe-inspiring dominance, stole the show each time her blue satin wings flapped into prominence. With great vigour Zazu organised, commanded and insulted all in the royal retinue and brought the house down every time.

The beautiful, regal lionesses, always stately and serene, reflected the changing moods and themes.

Their Mourning Song following Mufasa's murder created a genuinely sorrowful tone and showed mature understanding of the impact of his death.

It was clear that the bad but bouncy band of young hyenas were enjoying the performance too, as they entertained with their nonsense and daffy laughter, each time echoed by the audience.

Pumbaa's carefree attitude provided the perfect foil for Timon's quirky meerkat moves and whimsical asides.

Twiggling that the mature Simba and Nala, now grown to adult beauty, are falling in love, Timon announces the fact with obvious glee.

Timon's unselfconscious wiggle in the grass skirt seemed to capture the essence of a meerkat's personality.

The critical scene of Simba's meeting with the ghost of his father was directed with control and sincerity. Simba reclaims his honour and takes his lawful place as king.

With the return of rain and prosperity in the Pride Lands, Simba and Nala at last restore the 'Circle of Life' with their tiny cub presented to their subjects by a joyful Rafiki.

The rain may have come at the wrong time; harvest may have been held up; farmers may have been frustrated, but at Tooraweenah on Thursday night it was "Hakuna Matata" all the way.