

## *A kooky spin on a classic*

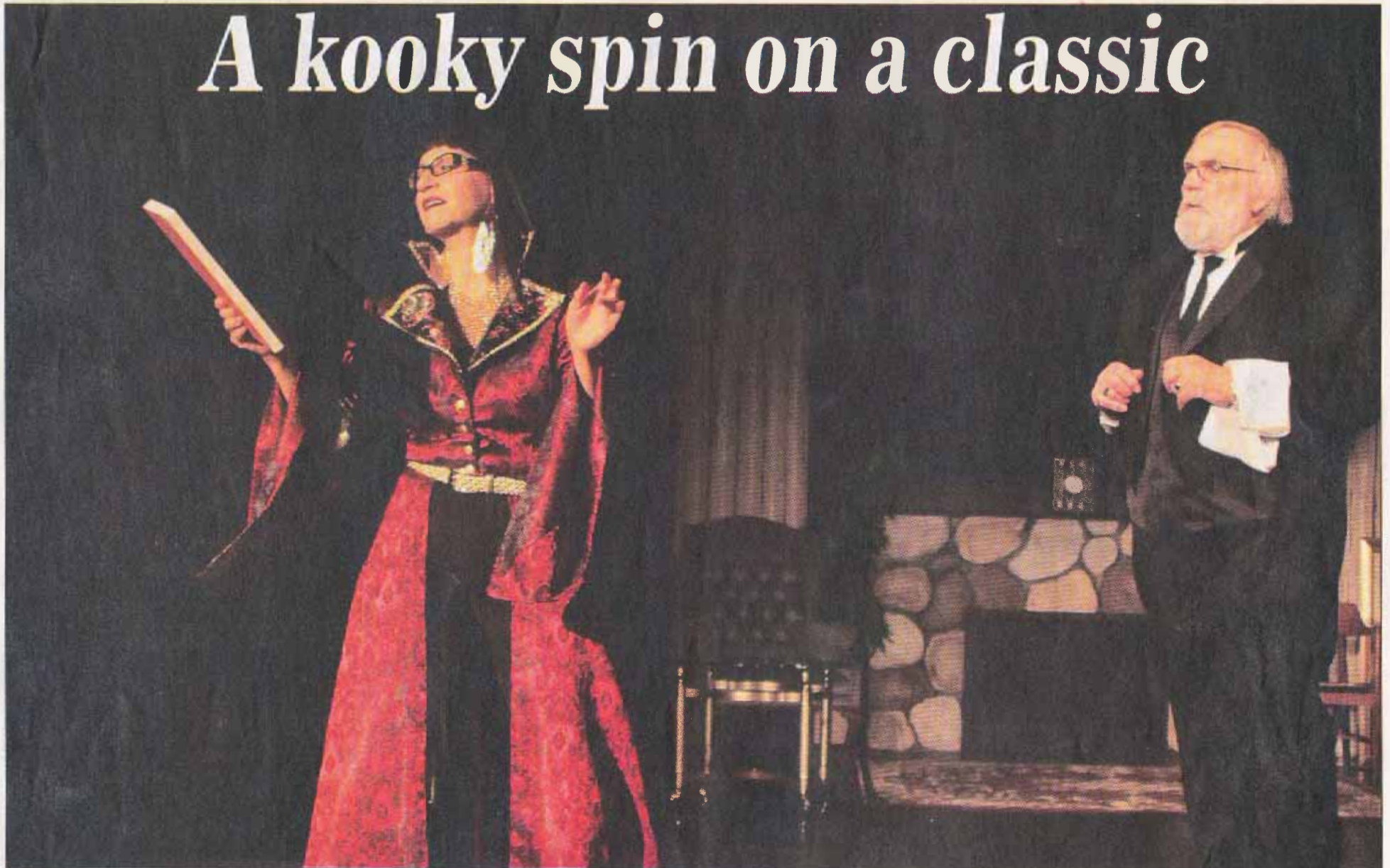


Photo by JEFF STOKOE/Advocate staff

Lady Elizabeth Bordon (The Wicked Stepmother), played by Marianne Christensen, and Butterworth, played by Glynn Humphreys, rehearse a scene from the pantomime *Snow White and the Seven Nobbits*, written by Albert Azzara. It is playing at the Scott Block beginning on Dec. 26 and running through Jan 3.

## SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN NOBBITS

A singing Snow White will be rescued from the Nordegg wilderness by seven mining Nobbits in this year's Red Deer Christmas pantomime.

After presenting a dancing Cinderella last December, a group of city thespians is preparing to introduce a wacky original panto for the entire family called *Snow White and the Seven Nobbits*.

This kooky spin on the Grimms' fairy tale, by Red Deer playwright Albert Azzara, will be staged by the Red Deer Players starting on Friday, Dec. 26, at the Scott Block theatre.

It loosely follows the story of Snow White and her shallow, looks-obsessed stepmother. The wicked Lady Borden discovers via her iPad that she's no longer the No. 1 beauty in the world, surpassed by her comely stepdaughter, who just turned 18.

Furious at being No. 2 (with that number's scatagorical associations), Lady Borden plots with her evil butler Butterworth, and a goon from the Calgary Hitmen, to do away with Snow White.

Just as all seems lost as the innocent young heroine is lured away into the West Country forest, she gets help from her best pal Buttons, Bingo the

panto horse, and the seven Nobbits (North American hobbits).

Meany, Mirthy, Muddley, Mumbley, Moany, Mousey, Medic and their adopted Mother Twerk (played by Azzara) happen to be inspecting the earthquake-wrought damage to their mine near Redford Ridge when they discover Snow White in distress.

Add to this convoluted plot line the fortuitous appearance of the handsome Chad Charming, and you have the makings of a happy ending — which is par for the course for fairy tales, as well as Christmas pantos.

"It's kind of a sweet story," said director Carole Forhan. But it's also so stupid-silly it's "very Monty Pythonish," she added.

Now that Red Deer has experienced one Christmas pantomime with Azzara's *Cinderella Dances With the Stars* in 2013, Forhan wants to make the family-friendly comedies an annual tradition that becomes as beloved here as in England.

People in the U.K. are so crazy for pantos, a London newspaper listed 400 pantomimes being staged across the country this month. "There were four pantos in just (this one) town alone," said Forhan.

Tickets for the Christmas productions usually go on sale in August and are quickly sold out, she added.

For the uninitiated, here are some English pantomime traditions: The plots are generally zany versions of well-known fairy tales that include some songs and are usually sprinkled with local references. (They sometimes even feature the appearance of local "celebrities.")

There's broad, slapstick acting and cross-dressing required, with a male actor taking on a dame/matron role. There are also reoccurring characters, such as the panto horse. And plenty of audience interaction is encouraged, with the stage heroes drawing cheers and the villains boos.

Forhan praised Azzara's "hilarious" *Snow White* script, which is shorter this year, and once again includes jokes on two levels — for tykes as well as moms and dads. "A lot of this flies over the heads of the kids and is really for the parents. It's very imaginative. It's really for everyone," she said.

The Red Deer Players, comprised of some Central Alberta Theatre members, is a relatively new group that's operating on a shoestring. The biggest challenge has been getting rehearsal

space. Forhan noted members were travelling to the Springbrook Multiplex on many evenings, where a room was made available.

Now that the troupe has official non-profit status, the Players can apply for grants to help with future costs.

In the meantime, Forhan is thrilled with her 17-actor cast. Snow White is played by Ashley Newman of Olds, who has a wonderful singing voice and looks and sounds like Disney's Snow White, said the director. The evil Lady Borden is being portrayed by Mari- anne Christensen, who depicted the quirky Queen Isadora of Duncan in last year's production.

There are also CAT veterans Vicki Dykes (Buttons), Geoff Tagg (the banker Mr. Norman Nasty), and Azzara assuming the dame role of Mother Twerk.

With the panto being staged throughout the school holidays between Boxing Day and Jan. 3, Forhan hopes local families will come out and enjoy "all the colour and silliness."

If they enjoy this pantomime, they might want to come back next Christmas, when the Red Deer Players plan to stage Azzara's new madcap script, *Aladdin Trouble*.

Shows are at 7 p.m., except for a 2 p.m. showing on Dec. 28. Tickets are \$20 (\$15 for children) from the Black Knight Ticket Centre.

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# Annie stumbles in awkward remake

### A DISTURBING GREED-IS-GOOD VIBE AND AN UPDATED, YET DISAPPOINTING, SCORE

BY LINDA BARNARD  
SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

**Annie**  
1.5 stars (out of four)  
Rated: PG

"What does the hard knock life mean?" ponders Quvenzhané Wallis as the 2.0 version of the optimistic orphaned miss with a song in her heart in Will Gluck's awkwardly blinged-out update of *Annie*.

We could say it's sitting through



Musically, *Annie* could do much better in its change of time and place from the Depression to 2014. Roosevelt is

