



Backstage at the BFG

October 2016

As an actor sitting backstage you get the unique perspective of hearing the audience's reaction to what is happening on stage. It is difficult to fully experience the audience reaction when you are performing because there are many distractions....lines to say, props to use, and of course other actors. Backstage with the BFG has been a lot of fun.

Briefly the story of the BFG involves an orphaned girl, Sophie, who accidentally discovers a giant as he brings dreams to sleeping children in the middle of the night. The giant (BFG) takes the girl back to his cave in

Giantland because he fears she will tell others about him and the grownups will put him in a zoo. The BFG, unique to other giants, eats only snozzcumpers (an icky poo vegetable). Such is not the case for his neighboring giants Childchewer, Fleshlumpeater, Bloodbottler and Bonecruncher, who, as their names suggest, eat children. Sophie and the BFG create a dream for the Queen of England so she knows what is happening and sends her military to capture the blood thirsty brutes and stop their night time child eating raids. As with all Roald Dahl stories the stakes are life and death and children are capable and at times fearless.

Magical's production doesn't shy away from this. The ghastly children eating giants, created by puppet master Mark Jenks, are true to their names wearing souvenirs of the children they have feasted on. The puppets are truly magnificent works of art. They are interesting, they are scary and they are awesome. Backstage you hear the audience gasp when the BFG first enters...he is big (approx. 11 ft), but sweet in a giant kinda way. When the mean giants enter, bigger still than the BFG, the gasps turn to giggling screams...like haunted house fun. After one such terrifying visit from Fleshlumpeater and Bloodbootler, Sophie and the BFG drink frobscottle, a fizzy drink that causes a tremendous amount of whizpopping. Backstage you hear the audience slowly start to understand that whizpopping is passing gas and, the laughter is contagious backstage when Sophie and the BFG let them rip. Literally!

With all the silliness and scariness there is also tremendous beauty. The BFG takes Sophie to Dreamland and teaches her to catch dreams. Watching this scene during rehearsals as they choreographed the movements with the lights you could tell it would be beautiful. But I have never seen the finished product that came about during tech week because actors are then backstage for the remaining rehearsals. But I know the effect was a success. When the lights change and the audience is taken to Dreamland you hear the oohs and ahhs as intense as the giggling screams.

I am sure our audiences are thrilled with the ride they take with our production of the BFG if what we can hear backstage is any indication. Having been on stage for over 30 years, I have been in plenty of productions I would just as soon forget. But it sure is a warm and fuzzy and satisfying feeling when you know you are part of something that brings a little magic into the lives of children and their families. We have some seats left for the remaining performances this weekend. As the Queen, I look forward to greeting you at the palace.