



At 69, the Festival is keen to stay young

Recommended for people aged 10 and above is Laurent Brethome's stage adaptation of a French children's classic by Charles Perrault, Riquet à la Houpe.

His Riquet is well-handled by a cast of three, accompanied by an on-stage live painter (Louis Lavadan) who creates scenery changes as we watch.

The story re-worked by Antoine Hérnotte is brought up to date in some, but not all ways.

A disgruntled king (François Jaulin) wants to marry his two daughters off to princes and pass on his heavy crown. Sounds straightforward, but one twin princess, Sublima, played by Yasmina Remil, is pretty but intellectually challenged, so the suitors are quick to dismiss her. They are even faster in rejecting her clever-clogs sister, Mimi Pédia (Dominique Gubser) because she lacks her sister's good looks.

Brethome is clear about the message in this fairy-tale. "This is my life story," he says. "I was very fat and twitched. It was hard at school. I want to show that people's beauty is inside them. It's important in today's society to speak about this; it's important to speak about this on stage."

Remil is modest about her looks, although it's fair to say that none of the actors are unattractive.

The role was a challenge, she says, as she really had to communicate what Sublima is like deep down: "She's not stupid. She has a slow memory. She sees things in a different way from other people. I try to convey this."

Messages for children and for teenagers run through this play, but are delivered in an acceptable way. Brethome does not lecture.

"Women can be independent and respected for that independence," he says of his Mimi Pédia character who decides that instead of waiting around for a husband she will travel the world.

Going against current trends in society in a number of respects, Brethome chooses to use paper costumes and traditional stage crafts such as shadow puppets and hand-turned magic lanterns. He wants to show aesthetic, hand-made alternatives for children who come to see Riquet. They are used to a world of ready-made and computerised special effects.

It's Brethome's first time in the Avignon 'In' programme with a play in the Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs for all aged 10 and up who enjoy painless, happy endings born along by a few laughs in light panto style.

Rosslyn Hams