



## [Spamalot](#)

at Palace Theatre, Manchester

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) November 2017

Monty Python's shamelessly camp Mickey Take of itself rolled into Manchester for a 5 night run this evening, and proved to be a highly entertaining newer rewritten version from the one I remember with great fondness on the West End when Spamalot first burst onto the stage in 2006. None of the irreverence in this Arthurian parody has been lost - in fact, it has probably gained some along the way!

The storyline - unless I have lost the plot - concerns a shrubbery and some Knights which say 'Ni', and follows the hapless journey of King Arthur and his band of merry men, sorry Knights, in their quest to find the Holy Grail. It's as camp as a row of tents in places, and the biting, sardonic off-beat Python humour abounds throughout.

For those, like me, who grew up with Python's Flying Circus, and simply couldn't wait until the following week to tune in to watch the next episode, then this is just about as near to true Monty Python anyone is ever going to get these days. Somehow it doesn't seem anywhere near as illicit and cutting edge as it did all those years ago - but I suppose that is inevitable. It is nevertheless hugely entertaining and in this particular incarnation, and excellently presented.

Songs familiar, taken from not just the Holy Grail film, but other Python films and sketches too; along with a few specially written ditties by the talented Eric Idle and John Du Prez, take us through the quest, from King Arthur recruiting his Knights to him finding the Grail and marrying the Lady Of The Lake, aka Guenevere.

***And now for something completely different...***

I liked the simplicity and almost make-shift nature of the set (**Sara Perks**), and the colourful costumes were a joy - with some extremely fast, even for a Musical, costume changes. The whole was taken very tongue-in-cheek and it was also a delight to have a live band too under the direction of **Dean McDermott**

. That is something which for me at least should be a prerequisite for any Musical, but sadly these days, due to trying to save money, many are relying on backing tracks which is both irksome and problematic. Talking of budget, the one thing this particular production could have

benefitted from was more ensemble. The stage looked very bare during the 'chorus' numbers.

**Daniel Buckroyd's** direction though was both fresh and in keeping with the spirit of both the show and Python in general, and we were treated to many of the film's more famous scenes and quotes. '**It's only a flesh wound!**' - sad to say that the chopping off of the Black Knight's legs was really extremely poorly executed and - although this may have been intentional, but I doubt it - laughably bad.

**Bob Harms** made a very poker-faced stiff King Arthur, a nice interpretation making a good foil for all the buffoonery and campness around him; whilst **Rhys Owen** was the absolute epitome of Arthur's coconut-clashing servant and side-kick Patsy. Four knights, all with their own individual characteristics, creating a tight and fun foursome, worked very well together with some nice chemistry. These were

**Johnathan Tweedle**

(Sir Lancelot),

**Norton James**

(Sir Galahad),

**Stephen Arden**

(Sir Robin), and

**Marc Akinfolarin**

(Sir Bedevere).

Prince Herbert this evening was played by the understudy, **Joel Benedict**, and was absolutely brilliant; however, all the male roles were completely overshadowed by the utterly stunning interpretation of The Lady Of The Lake by

**Sarah Harlington**

. Her vocal ability and agility, combined with her facial and physical contortions were side-splittingly hilarious and immaculately timed.

In short, a highly irreverent but wonderful romp and a bit of nostalgia for those old enough! Only don't sit on the first few rows of the stalls, as you might get trampled on or dragged onto the stage! Please don't stop that - it's silly!