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# Cracker of a pantomime brings festive cheer to north

MEMBERS of a far-flung Sutherland community enjoyed a festive treat last Friday when the pantomime came to them.

Around 35 adults and 15 children cheered and clapped as Glasgow travelling theatre company Theatre Presto performed *The Nutcracker* and the *Evil Mouse King* in Melness Community Centre (Taile Baile Mhealainis).

The pantomime was an adaptation of the classic tale, written in 1816 by German author Ernst Hoffmann, in which young Marie Stahlbaum's favorite Christmas toy, the *Nutcracker*, comes alive and, after defeating the evil *Mouse King* in battle, whisks her away to a magical kingdom populated by dolls.

Three trained actors played 10 different roles and there were plenty of costume changes, along with some versatile props. The actors greeted the audience before the show started and posed for photographs after the show.

Told predominantly through song, the storyline was mostly light-hearted - that is until the "evil" peppermint-hating *Mouse King* arrived and thoroughly unsettled the front row.

Fortunately the beautiful *Sugarplum Fairy* had provided the children with protection in the form of peppermint sweets.

Melness Hall secretary, Winfried Leopoldt said: "It was touching to see how

the children all held up their sweets or wrappers to help hold the *Mouse King* in check."

One of the unexpected stars of the show was a parent at the front of the audience who responded so enthusiastically to the *Sugar Plum Fairy's* requests that she declared: "A new star has been born!" and invited him to sing again.

The production went down a storm and Mr Leopoldt said: "It was a most enjoyable evening and the pantomime was presented in a very professional way.

"What the audience saw was a commendable performance from three actors with excellent voices, supported by a musical director who had assembled the

well-known tunes. We were delighted with the show and happy to present something for all the family at this time of year.

"It is reassuring to know that theatre performance can be held at affordable budgets in small village halls.

"We would love Theatre Presto to come back."

He added: "It is worth mentioning that it was not only the Melness and Tongue communities who benefited. Theatre Presto also tailored this pantomime for residents at care homes Sinclair Court in Melvich and Caladh Sona in Melness.

"Thanks is due to the Friends of Caladh Sona who engaged this theatre company for the last three years running."

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The theatre company's three actors took on 10 different roles with lots of costume changes.



The Sugar Plum Fairy was a hit with the audience.



The heroine clutches the nutcracker.



There was plenty of audience participation as the actors invited everyone to join in.