



Creatures of folklore

CREATURES from indigenous mythology are the stars of the stage production *The Nargun and the Stars*, playing in Perth for the Perth International Arts Festival.

Giant mechanical puppets, flying creatures and inflatable pieces bring to life Patricia Wrightson's much-loved 1974 children's fantasy novel of the same name.

Those who grew up in the early '80s and watched ABC television may recall the six-part series adaptation that screened in the afternoons. It is the story of Simon (12), played by Tom Green, who goes to live with his mother's cousins on a remote bush property after his parents die in a car accident.

Simon encounters mythical creatures, such as the wily water spirit Potkoorok, the Turong tree people, the Nyol rock people and the menacing stone Nargun.

What unfolds is a spectacular adventure with explosions, cave-ins, floods, a mighty battle and creatures galore that left audiences gob-smacked in its Sydney Festival debut.



Co-director Scott Wright said original author Wrightson was one of the first advocates for indigenous culture being included in contemporary stories.

"Patricia Wrightson had a passion for the folklore of the land but she was not bound by dreamtime mythology," he said.

"The creatures in this story come from three different countries, the Kurnai, Monaro and Boon Wurrung peoples from different parts of Victoria.

"Her novels at the time were the Harry Potter of Australian books."

Wright added there had been challenges to producing a contemporary story written by a white woman with indigenous content from several peoples.

"The process had to be very thorough and it was a long journey to gain all the permissions to go ahead with it," he said.

Wright said his role as co-director was to take charge of the puppets and the creatures, while co-director Wesley Enoch

directed the three actors in the play.

"The puppets were beautifully designed and built by EARTH Visual and Physical," he said.

"We tried to find existing animals on which to base the creatures. The Nyols, for instance, live in caves and so we based them on bats.

"We tried to exceed our expectations on puppetry and live actors, and I think we have achieved that. We are even using electronic imaging to create the images to evoke the landscape."

Wright said the production's appeal was much broader than that of a children's story.

"It's a question of which children have been enjoying it – the eight-year-olds at the show or the children who read the book and come back to see the show," he said.

"My hope is this show encourages another generation to enjoy these wonderful creatures and folklore," he said.

■ *The Nargun and the Stars* runs at Subiaco's Regal Theatre from February 18 to March 1.

Christian Wilkinson



Audiences in Sydney were gob-smacked... Simon (Tom Green) and Potkoorok in *The Nargun and the Stars*.