

Hello and welcome to this introduction to **The Velveteen Rabbit**, by Margery Williams. It is directed by Purni Morell.

The Vocaleyes audio-described performance is on Sunday 17th December, with a touch tour at 2.15pm and the performance at 3.00pm. The show lasts for 1 hour and 30 minutes including an interval.

During the show you will be able to hear an Audio Description of the action through a headset in the auditorium and your describers will be Ruth James and Lonny Evans. We're looking forward to meeting you at the touch tour.

In this introduction I am going to tell you about The Velveteen Rabbit, including the characters and what the stage looks like. There is a multi-ethnic cast of four male actors, who play all the characters in the play.

There once was a Velveteen Rabbit, and in the beginning he was really splendid. He was fat and bunched, as a Rabbit should be; and for at least two hours the Boy loved him. It's a heart-warming and much loved classic story about a very shy toy rabbit who longs for nothing more than to become Real.

The theatre's cushioned bench seats curve around the front of the stage, and each bench is a bit higher than the one in front, so that they go up in steps. This means you are looking down on the actors on the stage.

The floor of the stage is black, with the centre covered with white planks, which spread out like a fan towards us. Each plank is wider at the front and narrows towards the back. Above the narrowest point of the fan at the back is a huge Christmas Santa Stocking, hanging in the air. The stocking is quilted and patterned in diamonds and stripes in green, red and white with gold spots. There's a red bow on top of the stocking

and the heel and top have red and white stripes. On the left side of the stage is a black grand piano and piano stool.

In the floor are 7 trapdoors, hidden in the pattern of the wood. There's a hole in each one to open them, and inside are many of the props used in the show. Several of the spaces under the trapdoors are large enough to fit people, who can hide in them and then pop out. The first things brought out are lots of toys, mechanical toys such as robots from the trapdoors on the right side, while more traditional toys are brought out from the trapdoors on the left. For instance, there's a model boat, with all its sails fully flying, two wooden castle towers and lots of painted wooden soldiers of different armies.

These toys are brought out when we're in the Boy's nursery, which has two white painted curtains at the back that seem to hang either side of a window, showing blue sky, and later sparkling stars in a dark night sky. We also visit the Boy's bedroom, where there is a large double bed, with a tall steel frame that has a brass ball on each corner. The bed tilts up, with the head of the bed much higher than the foot, so that someone sleeping in it is tilted up towards us. There's a quilted coverlet on the bed and two enormous feather pillows.

The world of the imagination is very important in *The Velveteen Rabbit*, so that everything can seem to change into something else. For example, the bed is swung round and as it moves it becomes lots of other places and objects. It might become a ship, a mountain or even an animal.

Later we visit a wood – very simply indicated with a few things. There is a large wooden platform on the right, filled with earth that has enormous lettuces growing and a wooden frame with green plants trained up it. In the middle is an ornamental iron bench with wooden slats and on the left is a swing. At the back on the left is a wheelbarrow filled with flowers and plants.

There are four grown up male actors in the cast. Three of the actors play all the different characters in the show and the fourth man plays the piano.

The actors start the play in smart suits and the characters they play are simply indicated by a few bits of extra costume such as a hat or an apron.

One of the men plays the soft velveteen toy rabbit. He is a tall white guy with short brown curly hair and wide brown eyes. He wears brown corduroy trousers, brown shoes, a brown roll neck jumper and a soft brown velvet jacket. His tall pointed rabbit ears are imaginary. The rabbit is a soft toy that flops about when thrown on the bed or slumps on the floor with a fixed stare, blinking occasionally. However, when he plays with the boy he seems to come alive, moving all on his own with bounce and vitality.

Another one of the grown up male actors plays the little boy who owns the Velveteen Rabbit. He is a lithe, black actor dressed in a large grey cap, dark grey trousers, scuffed brown boots, a white checked shirt with braces and a floppy red bowtie. The little boy is full of life and loves playing with his toys. He whizzes energetically around the nursery making up lots of games and having great fun until it's time to calm down and clamber into bed.

The third male actor who has short silver hair and a matching beard puts on a frilly white mob cap and apron to play the little boy's Nanny, Nanna. Nanna tries to be strict and keep the boy's nursery spic and span. She is often tidying up and also helps the boy into bed at night.

Another toy in the Nursery that comes alive is an old Horse who walks shakily using two walking canes. We also meet two real live rabbits in the woods, who bounce up and down on black space hoppers.

The Cast and Creative team:

The Performers are:

Ashley Byam, Jason Carr, Stephen Kennedy and Christian Roe.

The Lighting Designer is David W Kidd

The Choreographer is Wilkie Branson

The Composer is Jason Carr

The Set and Costume Designer is James Button

The Director is Purni Morell