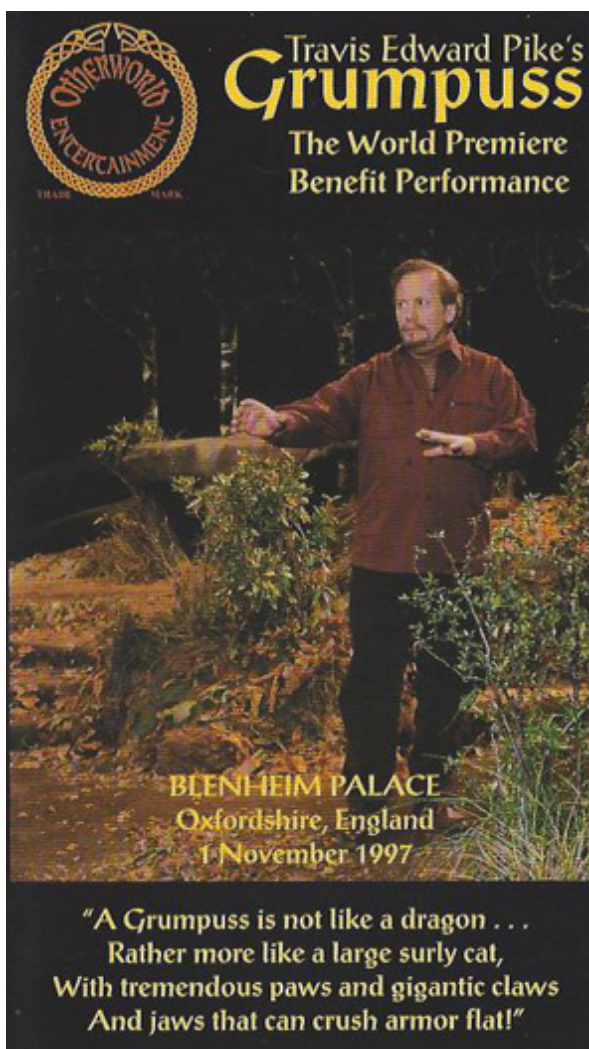


## Video Review

### TRAVIS EDWARD PIKE'S GRUMPUSS: The World Premiere Benefit Performance



machines, composed the music, wrote the comedy, and built the theatre.”

Well, I have a suspicion that the patience of musician/author/playwright/filmmaker Travis Edward Pike would give out if he were expected to build the theatre, but he might just represent a modern Hollywoodish version of Giovanni Bernini. Pike wrote the poem on which the play is based, crafted the rest of the play around it, composed the music, played the lead role, and also produced and directed the entire performance. And the results are delightful.

Pike, an American of Celtic ancestry, is hailed in some circles as an Archdruid. He's a bit more modest about it himself, maintaining that he is merely a *bard* (the first degree of Druidic initiation). However, he doesn't waste his time mourning the passing of the ancient, elitist bardic schools. Instead, he has embraced the motion picture industry, considering it to be the ultimate medium through which to convey the timeless myths, legends, and poetic traditions of his Celtic ancestors. His most recent success is *Grumpuss*.

Though *Grumpuss* features the talents of other performers, it is mainly a one-man show starring Travis Pike himself. He plays a bard, roused by the Queen of the Sidhe and her child minions, and forced to recite a gripping epic poem (“With rhymes! None of that blank verse!”), or else be executed. From then on, the show belongs to Pike.

I remember a rainy evening a long time ago, when I was watching Sir Kenneth Clarke's TV documentary series *Civilisation* for the first time. It was about the fourth or fifth episode, I'm not sure which one, but in this one, Sir Kenneth was in Rome, waxing eloquent about an opera which had been produced by the famous architect and sculptor, Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). I was particularly impressed when Sir Kenneth quoted a contemporary of Bernini, who stated that the sculptor “gave a public opera wherein he painted the scenes, cut the statues, invented the

Most modern audiences are composed of those who are becoming more and more accustomed to the *Star Wars*-type epic, with gorgeous stars playing the leads, crashing music and mind-blowing special effects. Thus they might at first think of a one-man stage show centered mainly around the performance of an epic narrative rhyme as something interesting, but not worth their time. Yet Pike not only pulls it off, but by the time he gets into the second verse of the poem, the audience is rapt. The poem is ingeniously crafted, and, very much in the tradition of the medieval epic poets who composed such masterpieces as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is timeless. It is also full of action, suspense, and

memorable characters. Just think: This was how our ancestors were entertained, in the days before TV, concert halls, or even the earliest theatres!

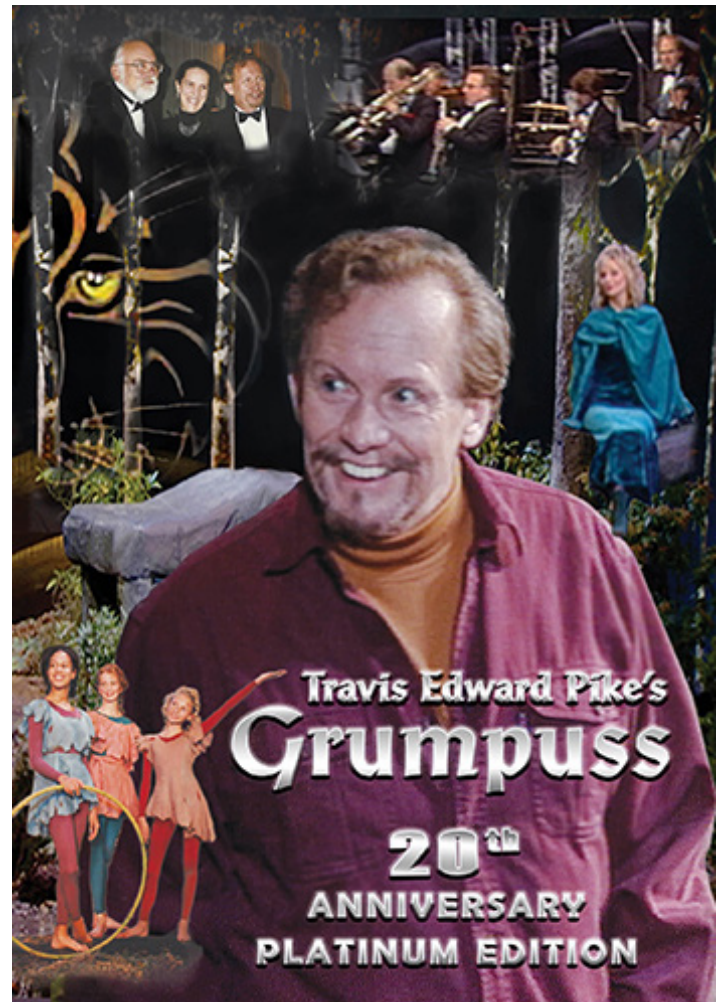
Who needs special effects? Pike plays the role of the Grumpuss, a big pussycat who has an erroneous reputation as an evil monster. He also plays the knight, the dwarf, and other such characters with all the skill of an Olivier. He not only recites the poem, but acts out the roles, miming swordfights and dramatic escapes so cleverly we tend to forget this is only one man. Believe me, this is more than worth the 90 minutes or so that you might spend watching it.

There are other performers worth watching as well. Anna Scott is deliciously bitchy as the Queen of the Sidhe. Aimee Johnson, Yvonne Hill, and Rose Meredith, who play the Queen's minions, are gifted young gymnasts who entertain the audience at the beginning of the play and right after the intermission, giving Pike a chance to catch his breath. Pike's music, Shaun Moore's set design, and Alitia Sands' choreography add just the right touch to make for a delightful evening.

Reviewers, even if they absolutely love what they're reviewing, are generally expected to give at least a little criticism, but I honestly can't think of anything to say in that light. As a vocalist, I would have loved to have heard some singing, but I can't recall any point in the play where it would have been appropriate, except perhaps at the very beginning — and anything stronger than Enya-esque “ooo's” and “ahhhs” would have been too distracting. It's darn near perfect as it is.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆☆

[Mary Devlin](#)



*In the 20-or-so years since Mary Devlin wrote this review, the technology has changed dramatically. The video cassette has been replaced by a remastered Grumpuss 20th Anniversary Platinum Edition on DVD. The original live, world premiere, benefit performance for the Save the Children Fund at Blenheim Palace was shot digitally, so when it was transferred to DVD, not only were the audio and video quality enormously improved, but the price of the 98-minute show was reduced to (\$19.95) -- less than the original VHS cassette version. Visit <http://www.grumpuss.com/VIDSAMPLES.html> to review clips from the DVD posted on Youtube. DVD BONUS FEATURES include Travis Edward Pike's video introduction to his production, and THREE SLIDESHOWS: "The Search for a Perfect Venue," "Found: A Nearly Perfect Venue," and "Grumpuss Premiere Notes and Notables." Or explore the Grumpuss Legacy at <https://www.grumpuss.com/HISTORY.html> where you'll learn about the Grumpuss reviews, interviews, awards, testimonials and more!*