

Taliesin
The Ark
Harry Browne

THIS tale from Wales is part of that country's folk tradition, but for an Irish audience, unfamiliar with it, it's also a rattling good yarn, told with wit and verve by Arad Goch.

On a cleverly-employed wooden stage with a radiant-blue, celtic-y backdrop, five actors are kept busy in a dozen or more roles — and that's when they're not dancing about in their big wooden shoes (in the case of the men) or picking up an instrument.

The story starts when the witch Ceridwen sets out to cast a spell which will "de-stupify, de-idiotise" her foolish son, Morfran; where it goes from there could fill this page, though it's packed pacily into a hour of humour, music, inventive direction and even an itty-bitty-witty touch of eroticism. And the kids may also enjoy picking out echoes of Irish myth and music.

Taliesin, the wizard/poet of the story, is punnily named in Welsh for his "beautiful forehead" and the "fine payment" he represents to the man who rescued him as a baby. This attractive production, which won the Best Children's Production in the Waterford Festival Choice Awards yesterday, offers ample reward to the parents, teachers and children with the foresight to have bought tickets.

Just over a year after "Europe's first cultural centre for children" opened, the folks at the Ark certainly have reason to celebrate. The Children's Season of the Dublin Theatre Festival has seen five widely contrasting international shows play to full houses every morning, afternoon and evening for a fortnight — and the warmth and immense flexibility of the space has been confirmed several times over.