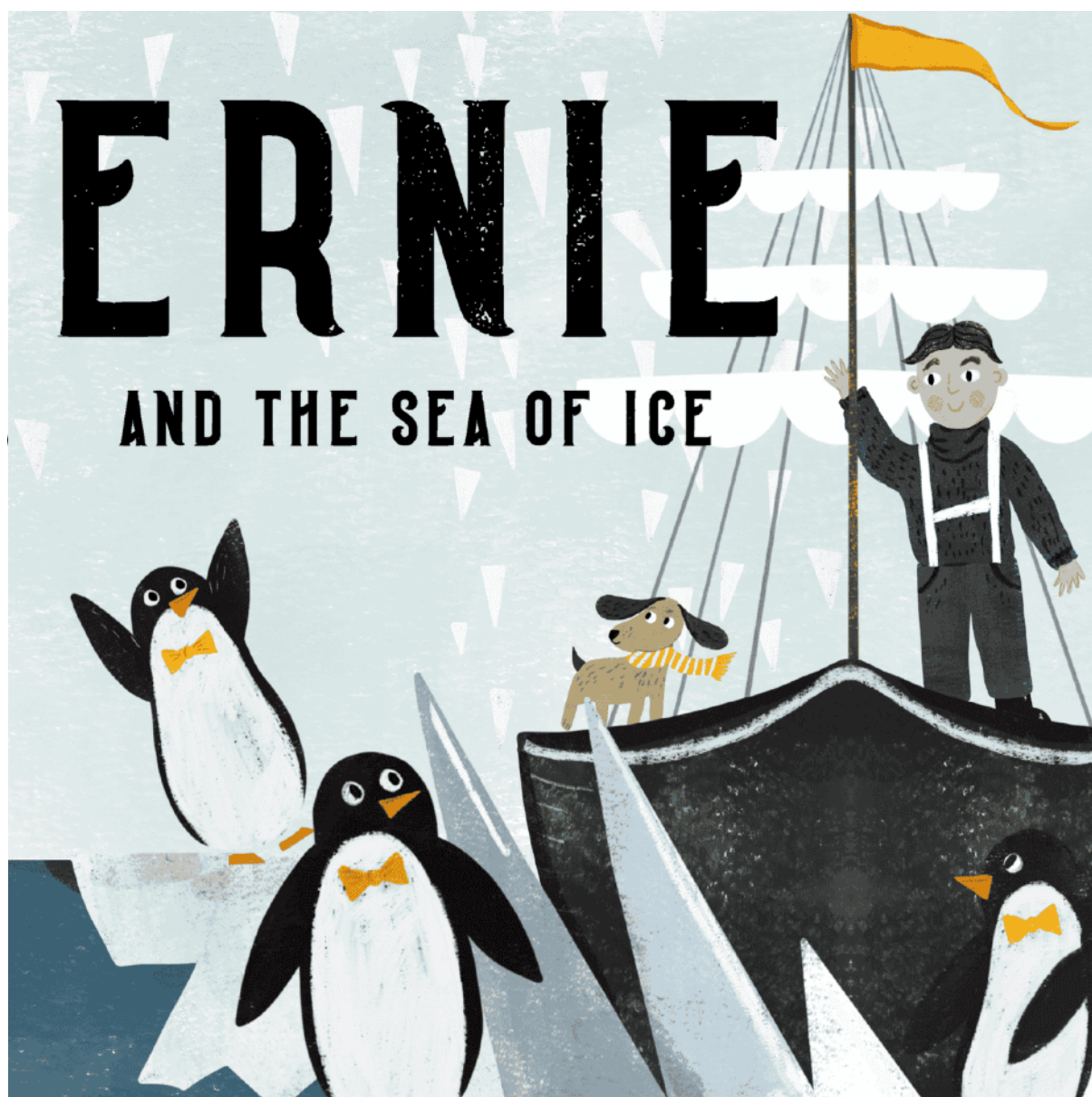


VISUAL STORY:



Ernie and the Sea of Ice

Exeter Phoenix, December 2025

A relaxed-format guide to the story, characters, and sensory moments in the show.

WHAT IS A RELAXED PERFORMANCE?

A relaxed performance is where the ambience of the auditorium and theatre 'rules' are relaxed, to create a less sensory-intense environment.

Quirk Theatre take a relaxed approach in the room at every show, but also designate a special 'relaxed performance' where some changes are made to the show, to further reduce any potential sensory triggers.

Our relaxed public performance this year is **Monday 22 December at 4.30pm.**

Chill out areas

Everyone can feel free to go in and out of the auditorium, make noise or move around, and do whatever it is you need to do to relax.

If you want to leave the auditorium at any time during the performance, there are chill out spaces you can go to and this will be explained before the start of the show. You can go to these if you need to relax or take a break before going back in to carry on watching the show if you want to.

Lights and sound

For the relaxed performance, some changes have been made to the intensity of sound and lighting in order to reduce sensory stressors.

USEFUL INFORMATION ON THE DAY

Performance time

The performance will last about 75 minutes, without an interval.

Devices

You can bring tablets and devices into the auditorium, but please no photography.

Food & Drink

You may bring food and drink into the auditorium.

If you have any questions or need assistance on the day, please find someone with a black and white Exeter Phoenix lanyard or speak to the Box Office.

If you have any feedback after the show please email our Visitor Services Manager:
annaruth.peelcusson@exeterphoenix.org.uk

VISUAL STORY

This Visual Story describes what you will see and hear during the performance of Ernie and the Sea of Ice. It includes notes about loud sounds, surprises, lighting changes, and moments where the audience is invited to join in.

The show is lively, funny, and sometimes noisy, but nothing is intended to frighten. You can always look away, cover your ears, or leave and return whenever you need.

THE CHARACTERS

Ernie

A child who loves his mum very much and worries about her going away on a scientific expedition. He is energetic, emotional, imaginative, and has lots of big feelings.

Mum

A scientist who studies ice and microplastics. Enthusiastic, funny, and adventurous. She is preparing to travel to Antarctica.

Dad

Cheerful, calm and gentle. Helps keep the peace when Ernie gets stressed.

The Shackleton Crew (played by actors switching roles)

- **Ernest Shackleton** (played by Ernie in the story-within-the-story)
- **Worsley** – a dramatic, excitable ship’s captain
- **Crean** – practical, calm, and quietly funny
- **McNish** – the ship’s carpenter with a strong accent and lots of grumbling
- **Blackborrow** – a very chatty stowaway with endless enthusiasm
- **Marston** – a dramatic French artist
- **Frank Hurley** – the ship’s photographer
- **Macklin** – the ship’s doctor who performs a silly pretend operation

Pongo the Penguin

Ernie’s toy penguin who appears in the “cabaret show” scene.

Mrs Chippy

McNish's pet cat who travels on board the Edurance ship with the crew.

ABOUT THE SET

Most of the story takes place in:

- **Ernie's bedroom** (a cosy, low-lit space)
- **A rotating iceberg prop**
- **The inside of the ship "Endurance"**
- **Snowy outdoor scenes with wind, ice, and shifting lights**

The design changes quickly, and actors move set pieces to turn the bedroom into Antarctica.

SENSORY NOTES – IMPORTANT

Throughout the show, you will experience:

Loud or Sudden Sounds

- Ice cracking
- Ship creaking and snapping
- Wind and storms
- A few "surprise" sound cues such as a *record scratch*, loud *crunches*, and a *sawing* sound during the silly surgery scene

Lighting

- Dim bedtime lighting
- Bright ice and snow scenes
- Flashing lights when ice breaks
- Fast colour changes during magic tricks
- Gentle twinkly lighting at Christmas moments

Audience Interaction

- Characters may talk directly to the audience
- Ernie shakes some audience members' hands
- Audience members may be invited to help with "dog training"
- Later, the whole audience is invited to mime rowing with "invisible oars"

Comedic / Slightly Grotesque Moments

- A silly pretend surgery (with a flying fake heart)
- Fart sound effects in the dog-training scene
- A penguin comedy performance

All these moments are playful and not realistic.

THE STORY – SCENE BY SCENE



SCENE 1 – Christmas Eve in Ernie's Bedroom

The show begins with gentle snow sounds. Lights rise softly.

Ernie is upset because his mum is going to Antarctica after Christmas. He hides under pillows, shouts, paces, and worries she'll be eaten by polar animals.

There is a mix of:

- gentle lighting
- some raised voices
- playful moments (Mum pretends to be a leopard seal)

Ernie finally goes to bed with his toy penguin Pongo. Just as the lights go out, Mum suddenly switches them back on (a surprising moment). She begins telling Ernie the story of **Ernest Shackleton**, the explorer he is named after.

The bedroom transforms into the start of Shackleton's adventure.



SCENE 2 – Recruiting the Crew

Mum tells Shackleton's story while Ernie "becomes" Shackleton.

Lighting shifts toward brighter colours.

Ernie interviews several crew members:

- Worsley
- Percy Blackborrow (very fast talker)
- McNish (grumbly)
- Crean (calm and practical)

This scene is very funny and playful. There are no scary surprises.



SCENE 3 – The Docks & Setting Sail

A bright, warm lighting state shows the docks.

Ernie greets the audience as if they are crowds coming to wave off the ship.

There is gentle rocking movement as the ship begins its journey.



SCENE 4 – Inside the Ship

Lighting becomes warm and cosy.

Several humorous characters appear:

- **Charles Green the cook**
- **Marston the dramatic artist**
- **Frank Hurley the photographer**
- **Macklin the doctor**, who performs a *very silly pretend operation*.

Sensory notes:

- beep-beep hospital sound
- exaggerated sawing noises
- squelching sounds
- a fake heart flies out (comedic, not graphic)
- lots of laughter and chaos

Soon after, the ship hits ice with *loud cracking sounds*.



SCENE 5 – The Weddell Sea

Lighting becomes icy blue with snow effects.

The crew emerges through hatches and roof panels to describe the amazing ice. Blackborrow appears unexpectedly, revealing he has stowed away.

Sudden **ice-cracking sound effects** and **flashing lights** occur, but characters stay calm.

They push the ship through ice.



SCENE 6 – The Dogs

The audience lights rise slightly so Crean can “train” the dogs with help from volunteers.

There are:

- silly growly dog voices
- fart sound effects
- gentle audience participation

This scene is funny and light.



SCENE 7 – The Ship Becomes Stuck

The lighting becomes dimmer and cooler.

Cracking sounds return as McNish panics about the ice. Ernie announces that the ship is **completely stuck** for the winter.

Worsley has a dramatic meltdown (loud but comedic).

Ernie slaps him lightly to calm him (played for humour).



SCENE 8 – The Cabaret Night

Warm lighting and upbeat music.

A homemade cabaret show is performed to keep spirits up.

- McNish reluctantly reads a poem
- Penguins dance
- Funny penguin choreography
- Silly magic tricks
- Audience laughter encouraged

This is one of the noisiest, liveliest scenes.



SCENE 9 – The Magic Tricks

Worsley performs a magic curtain trick. McNish and Crean perform a “sawing a person in half” gag.

Blackborrow keeps revealing the trick “by accident.”

Lighting is colourful and playful.

Noises include:

- sawing
 - exaggerated “ta-da” sounds
 - some flashes of light
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SCENE 10 - “Dear Old Blighty” song

The crew sings a sentimental song with a banjo. The audience can read the lyrics on a chalkboard and is invited to join in.

The ship begins to tilt; lights flicker as danger grows.

Eventually Ernie shouts “**Abandon ship!**” and everyone rushes out.

This moment has:

- louder sounds
- some visual chaos



SCENE 11 – Camping on the Ice

Snow, wind, and dim lighting.

The crew now camps outside on the ice.

A snow bucket is dropped on McNish (slapstick). Their tea freezes (sound effect).

McNish and Blackborrow squabble with frozen laundry and sweeping.

They resort to desperate measures to fill their tummies while stranded.

Noises include:

- faint gunshot

Gradually the sun returns (brief bright light that fades quickly).



SCENE 12 – The Ship Sinks

This is a **dramatic but not frightening** moment.

- wooden creaking
- groaning sounds
- the mast falls
- the crew watches the Endurance sink

Then silence, wind, and low cold light. Shackleton decides they must now travel home.



SCENE 13 – The Lifeboat Escape

Audience lights rise again.

Everyone is invited to take out their **invisible oar** from under their seat and row along.

Sea sound grows louder. Ice sheets shift.

The scene is energetic but not threatening.



SCENE 14 – Storm Journey to South Georgia

Large sheets create a stormy sea. There is:

- wind
- waves
- movement
- a loud “big wave” sound

The men wash up exhausted on land.

A blizzard projection appears as they begin climbing the mountain.



SCENE 15 – The Cliff Edge

The lighting is stark and cold.

The three men reach a high “cliff.”

Shackleton (Ernie) panics and cries. Worsley and Crean reassure him that bravery includes fear.

The audience joins in a soft repeated line from the earlier song.

The three “jump” (with a sound cue and brief strobe). The world spins, lights swirl, and the set transforms back into Ernie’s bedroom.



SCENE 16 – Christmas Morning

The lighting softens.

Ernie wakes from his dream, changed and brave. Mum and Dad enter gently.

Ernie gives Mum his special toy Pongo so she won’t feel scared on her expedition.

A warm family hug ends the show.

Snow falls in gentle projection. Ernie opens his stocking, and the lights fade out softly.

AFTER THE SHOW

Cast return for a relaxed curtain call.

You can clap, wave, or stay quiet – everything is welcome.

You can leave whenever you need.

Thank you for coming. We hope you enjoyed the show!