

Review: 'Wicked' at the Playhouse *****



There is very little that Wicked cannot do. Throughout its near three hour run time, the Playhouse is bathed in a vivid green light. The magic and mystique shimmers from the stage; the stunning vocals echo from the performers to the mouths agape in the balcony seating. *This winter, the city of Edinburgh is well and truly under the spell of Wicked.*

Crossing paths at university, a ditzy blonde do-gooder and a green-faced clever outcast become unlikely friends. But as the freedom in the land of Oz comes under strain from a higher power, the pair find themselves split in opinion with a handsome lover in between.

Launched on Broadway over 11 years ago, Wicked has enjoyed an triumphant, unstoppable run on both on the West End and stateside, and shows little sign of stopping. Gorgeous in its set and costume design, it exudes a meticulous sense of honing and skill down to the tiniest detail; whether that's the impeccably choreographed routines and lighting or the finely tailored gowns and suits the characters wear.

Taking center stage of the production's UK tour are Midlothian's Ashleigh Gray as Elphaba (the Wicked Witch of the West) and Emily Tierney as (the Good Witch) Glinda. Their diverse stage chemistry ranges from stone cold disgust to affection effortlessly. It would seem the time touring the show has worked wonders with this duo. Vocally, the ensembles are pitch perfect; resonant even when the lights go out. Tierney's twee and sickly sweet performance as Glinda is spot on. She's a delightful stage presence with fantastic vocal talent; even if her sung dialogue is sometimes lost behind an

operatic vibrato.

But *Wicked*'s unmissable star is the wonderful Ashleigh Gray. Her mostly vulnerable stage presence turns dominating and powerful as we set into the second act. Her vocal talent is undeniable. She hits notes that prove her position as one of theatre's most prominent female characters and does beautiful things with them. I tend to find an Elphaba proves her worth in that last note of the production's most famous song, 'Defying Gravity'. Here, Gray exceeds expectations, leaving the audience in mesmerising shock; emotive tears in their eyes. This is the best version I have heard since Idina Menzel's renowned original take.

It's only a matter of time before the dictionary can define musical theatre in just one word: *Wicked*. An all encompassing, joyous production that balances true tenacity and tongue in cheek humour. Dazzlingly performed and visually spectacular, it will exceed your expectations in every possible manner.



Wicked runs at the Edinburgh Playhouse from Wednesday 19th November 2014 to Saturday 10th January 2015. Best ticket availability is from Monday-Thursday.