

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2015 REVIEW – Chicken Licken and the Little Red Hen *****



‘What do you need to make bread?’ *‘But I like pizza!’*

‘What do you need to make it wet?’ *‘The sea!’*

‘Has anyone got an egg?’ *‘I’ve got a banana!’*

Wednesday afternoon’s audience for **DNA Puppetry’s *Chicken Licken and the Little Red Hen*** provides as many moments of hilarity as the show itself, a fast-paced flight through the adventures of the eponymous fowl, her friends **Henny Penny, Ducky Lucky, Goosey Lucy** and **Turkey Lurky**, and their hungry foe **Foxy Loxy**.

DNA’s **Adam Bennett** encourages the young audience to join in at every turn – and join in they do, with shrieks of laughter, shouts of advice, the occasional anxious question – ‘Will all the other ones be OK? When will they come back?’ (They don’t...) – and some slightly superior comments from the age 7 going on 27 girls at the front: ‘It’s a *puppet*’. ‘I *told* you I was right’.






Bennett plays every character in this performance, and his voices are as wonderful as his mastery of physical theatre; the children clearly love seeing the mess he makes with the dough, his (failed) attempts to juggle with an egg and his hysterical gobbling turkey – in many children’s shows these visual gags are overplayed and lose the audience’s attention, but here the action is non-stop. The adults are catered for with sharp asides (‘It’s chicken in a sack!’) but it’s all good clean – or rather, floury – fun; no-one’s granny’s going to be scandalised. What’s more, the tiered seats of the old lecture theatre at Summerhall mean that everyone can see without standing on people’s heads.

✘ Like many fables and fairy stories, ***Chicken Licken and the Little Red Hen*** is not without its dark side. Foxy Loxy really is a bit creepy, especially when his tongue lolls out, and the fate of the heroine’s entourage did seem to worry a few of the children, though most were easily distracted by the next bit of slapstick. DNA’s puppets – and set – are simple

but spot-on; Bennett brings Chicken Licken's character alive, and not only via her rather dippy voice – the slightest nod of her head or waggle of her wings conveys her feelings brilliantly. The hen, turkey, goose and duck are seen only as shadow puppets behind a tea towel screen, but that doesn't limit their entertainment value, and when Bennett bathes Chicken Licken in flour ('a flour shower') the little boy in front of me is delighted: 'I think she likes it!'

Being the cynical old misery that I am, I sometimes feel  that shows for children play more to grown-ups' nostalgia-lust than to what today's under-10s really want to see – a bit like educational toys, which seem to cater more for the aspirations of the parents than the pleasure of the mini-consumer; ***Chicken Licken and the Little Red Hen*** is an exception – it's professionally performed, very funny, and just a tiny bit scary – a great afternoon for families.

Chicken Licken and the Little Red Hen is on at [Summerhall](#), 1 Summerhall (Venue 26) at 3.35pm (45 minutes), 10th-29th August 2015 (no shows on Mondays 17th & 24th); tickets are available from the Fringe Box Office or online [here](#).

