

What's on at Edinburgh's Christmas? – Stick Man at the Spiegeltent!




Where can you go with some umbrellas, a beach ball, a glove puppet and a bunch of sticks? Quite a few places if you happen to be **Stick Man**, who, in the space of less than an hour, leaves the Family Tree to visit a park, a beach and a river – and take a ride with a very special red-coated friend.

Scamp Theatre's adaptation of **Julia Donaldson** and **Axel Scheffler's** ***Stick Man*** opens this week at the **Spiegeltent** in **St Andrew Square**. If you're as old as I am, you've probably only heard of this wooden wonder if you've got grandchildren – but Donaldson and Scheffler's book is a massive hit with young readers, so much so that an animated film version will appear on BBC1 this Christmas, voiced by an all-star casting including **Martin Freeman, Hugh Bonneville, Jennifer Saunders, Russell Tovey, Rob Brydon** and **Sally Hawkins**.



Meanwhile, back in the Spiegeltent, **Sean Kane, Claire Dargo** and **Gordon Cooper** burst onto the stage, which is handily elevated so that everyone can see, (although I personally think that parents who let their children stand on their laps should be relegated to the back row – a family behind me actually had to move when their view was completely blocked). The pace of the show is fast – it needs to be with this age group – and in no time at all we've been introduced to Stick Man himself (Kane), his '**Stick Lady Love** (Dargo) and their stick children three...' – the latter appearing only as

twiglets, but surprisingly lively nonetheless. Kane, Dargo and Cooper hardly ever stop moving; the choreography is lively and sharp, with exaggerated movements designed to entertain, and the Stick Man song is equally upbeat and memorable (so memorable, in fact, that my husband couldn't stop singing it, and no, he's not 3, nor even 33...). 

The story begins when Stick Man decides to go for an early morning jog (having a young family, he's no doubt aiming to avoid any involvement with breakfast...). Big Mistake – from then on it's all downhill as he encounters one danger after another, all of them played with impressive adaptability by Dargo and Cooper. From barking dogs to nesting birds, the world holds many dangers for an innocent stick, some more light-hearted than others. A game of beach cricket with Stick Man as the bat amuses most of the junior audience (and also, when the cast temporarily loses the ball, the parents) but Dargo's marauding dog seems a tad too scary for some children, even if he does lift his leg against our hero's torso.



Props in this show are kept to a minimum, with excellent results – swirling umbrellas create a wonderful underwater world as Stick Man floats downstream, then transform the stage into a beautiful snowy landscape just a few minutes later; Dargo's glove puppet swan is utterly convincing, with Cooper's saxophone giving the bird a most lifelike voice. The sound effects throughout the show are one of its strengths – Cooper manages numerous swaps from stage to glockenspiel, whistle and all manner of wooden instruments with ease, creating noises that hugely enhance the story. It's also good to be able to hear every one of the actors' words; their projection is perfect and never drowned out by the music.

Like all good children's shows, *Stick Man* includes a bit of audience participation and a few corny jokes, the latter more likely to be appreciated by the adults than the pre-schoolers

– but it's all good clean fun and certainly nothing you couldn't take your granny to. Although the show is recommended for children aged 3+, I feel it could be more suited to a slightly older age group; most children in Saturday morning's audience loved every minute, but a few of the very young ones around me seemed genuinely upset by some of the scarier scenes and the loudest moments, although they were all cheerful enough by the time the story reached its happy – and very Christmassy – ending.

And the moral of the story? Well you can make of it what you will; *I'd* say it's that middle-aged Daddies who try to get out of Family Duties end up with their just desserts. But that's just me...



Julia Donaldson (also the author of the much celebrated ***Gruffalo***, ***Room On The Broom*** and many more) has praised Scamp Theatre's production, saying 'it sends shivers down my spine'. The show's London cast has already received 5* reviews from *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Sunday Express*, so if your children can't get enough of *Stick Man*, make sure you get your tickets to this imaginative show now.

Stick Man is at the **Spiegel tent, St Andrew's Square** until 29th December 2015 (there are no shows on 23rd and 30th November, 7th, 14th 25th and 26th December). Tickets cost £60 for a family of four or £18.50/£14.50 individually; they may be booked online [here](#) or by calling 0844 545 8252. You can also buy tickets in person at the Box Office, subject to availability, but Edinburgh's Christmas organisers strongly recommend advance purchase. Residents of **EH postcode areas** are entitled to a **20% discount** on ticket prices; the discount will be applied automatically if you book online, but you must then bring proof of address when you collect the tickets from the Box Office.

All images are of the London cast of *Stick Man* and are (c)
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