

# Review: Hairspray \*\*\*



When I told my daughter last week that I was going to see Hairspray at the Edinburgh Playhouse she expressed surprise that I was going to such a show, saying she didn't think this would be my cup of tea. I must admit I wasn't sure what to expect but Hairspray is actually quite good with some powerful songs and a feel-good factor which, given the theme throughout the show – racism in Baltimore, the largest city in the U.S state of Maryland in the early 1960s – is quite an achievement.

The story tells of Tracy Turnblad, played with great enthusiasm by Rebecca Mendoza. Tracy is what may be described as stocky but shows great determination not to let her size or the prejudices of others drag her down. Tracy's dream, as with many others of her young age, is to dance on the Corny Collins tv show and meet Link Larkin, the local heartthrob and singer, played by Edward Chitticks.

Tracy is supported throughout by her best friend Penny Pingleton, played by Annalise Liard-Bailey. The character of Penny Pingleton has an irritating high-pitched squeal of a voice. Yes, the show is based in America where high-pitched voices make themselves heard sometimes at the expense of

others, but I did find this somewhat off-putting.

Tracy admirably fights against the racist policies of the city and ends up in solitary confinement (or refinement as she amusingly called it) in a detention centre for daring to become friendly with some of the black community. Penny Pingleton, in supporting her friend, actually falls in love with a young black man called Seaweed.

For me the highlight of the show was almost unintentional. Tracy's mother Edna – played by Matt Rixon – linked brilliantly with her father Wilbur, played by Norman Pace, one half of the comedy duo Hale and Pace who were household names in the 1990s. Early in act two, Mr and Mrs Turnblad performed *You're Timeless to Me*, a touching song of love and affection over the years. When Pace slightly corpsed it added to the enjoyment clearly felt by the Playhouse audience. Rixon added to the laughter and his character proved hugely popular. Rixon is the son of well-known actor and television star Matthew Kelly.

Hairspray's musical numbers are relentless and performed with so much energy. The rousing finale of *You Can't Stop the Beat* had some of the audience on their feet. Most powerful of all the singers was Motormouth Maybelle, played by former X-Factor contestant Brenda Edwards.

If you love American high-school type musicals, you'll love Hairspray. If, like me, you're not a huge fan of this genre then you probably won't. But most of those going to the Edinburgh Playhouse to see the show this week will have a fair idea of what to expect.

Edinburgh Reporter rating: \*\*\*

Hairspray is on at the Edinburgh Playhouse until Saturday 17th March 2018. Tickets [here](#).