

Review: Titanic the Musical



When I first read that *Titanic the Musical* was coming to the Edinburgh Playhouse I did wonder if it were a sign of the times that there is no historical event which can't be the subject of a harmonious show. The story of how the 'unsinkable' ship sank in 1912 with the loss of more than 1,500 souls was one of the 20th century's biggest tragedies. But while the audience already know the outcome of the story, the sub-plots contained within the ship's demise are what makes this musical a highly-charged emotional affair.

In today's high-tech age it can be difficult to imagine the wonderment and awe this huge ship created when it was completed in March 1912. It was described as the 'biggest moving thing on Earth'. At nearly 900 feet long, a breadth of 92 feet and amassing nearly 50,000 tons, the RMS Titanic was the largest ship of its kind and was the 'baby' of the British shipping company White Star Line's chairman J Bruce Ismay, whose story features heavily in the musical.

With such a magnificent creation of such a vast size, it's easy to imagine just why so many people were convinced the ship was unsinkable and for the high society of the early 1900s the prospect of travelling from England to New York in just six days was hugely appealing.

In the musical, Ismay is played with some conviction by Simon Green with the shipping company chairman bursting with pride as he sails on Titanic's maiden voyage. He is portrayed as the main villain of the piece, insisting the great ship increases its speed – against the advice of others – as it powers across the Atlantic. That Ismay managed to leave the sinking vessel on one of the lifeboats merely added to his villainous persona.

Philip Rham is superb as Titanic's Captain, Edward Smith with Scot Kieran Brown playing the guilt-ridden William McMaster Murdoch, the First Officer who was the officer in charge when the ship struck the iceberg.

However, this isn't just a story of how such a massive ship was hit by tragedy. Claire Machin's performance as Alice Beane, having the gall to dance with first class passengers is a delight as is the touching story of Isidor and Ida Straus, (beautifully played by Dudley Rogers and Judith Street) an elderly couple still very much in love after many years. Their refusal to be parted as the ship goes down tugs at the heart strings.

The music throughout catches perfectly not only the sombre mood but those lighter touching moments and there is a touch of humour throughout the show which is quite impressive given the subject matter.

Where *Titanic the Musical* excels is its production. Danielle Tarento, Vaughan Williams and Steven M. Levy have captured the rawness of this tragedy quite brilliantly and it's one of the best musical productions I have seen in years. When the

shattering crack of the Titanic hitting the iceberg brought down the curtain at the end of Act One there was a highly audible gasp from the audience.

The highly talented cast helped, of course, and while there may be no 'big name' stars on show, every one of the cast performs with a passion and professionalism that does them huge credit. The story is one every member of the audience knows but the players still manage to invoke an emotional reaction from the hugely appreciative audience – the standing ovation at the end of the show was a testament to that.

The show lasts 2 hours and 40 minutes (including the interval) – the same time it took the Titanic to sink after hitting the iceberg. The first act was around 85 minutes which, perhaps, was rather too long but the second, dramatic act was just right.

Titanic the Musical is one of the most powerful musical shows you will see with excellent performances from a talented cast and quite breath-taking production. Unlike the iceberg the RMS Titanic struck more than a century ago, *Titanic the Musical* is unmissable.

Titanic the Musical is on at the Edinburgh Playhouse until Saturday 16th June. Tickets [here](#).

Edinburgh Reporter rating: ****