

# Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018: Opera Mouse\*\*\*\*\*

Children will love this show. Grown ups will love this show. *Opera Mouse* is a simple tale simply told – but told with such warmth, skill and speed that the audience is engaged, amused and thoroughly entertained for its entire 45 minute run.

Tilly Mouse yearns to leave behind the bean can in which she lives with her brother Tommy and Mumma Mouse. She's heard the music calling to her through the theatre wall and she *knows* she's going to be a famous opera singer. There's only one tiny problem..... Even an opera diva ostrich (oh yes...) doesn't think a mouse can make it. How Tilly beats the odds, learns to accept help from her brother, and makes it on the world stage is the basis of this fun introduction to operatic singing.

Opera singer **Melanie Gall** and storyteller **Eden Ballantyne** are perfect in this production. With the help of three glove puppets and a couple of shawls they create an hilarious, rollicking adventure, both of them exuding so much enthusiastic *joie de vivre* that you can't help but enjoy yourself. That they are clearly having a whale of a time (despite poor Melanie's hacking cough...) is one of the many things that make *Opera Mouse* stand out among children's productions; their jokes (which are very funny, whether you're 5, 55 or 105 – though if the latter, you might find the seats in the Pleasance Courtyard just a teeny bit trying) even make *them* laugh, and they play off one another like the pros that they are. Ad libbing comes naturally to them, they have the children involved from the get-go, singing, screeching, and giving vent to their wacky, uninhibited opinions.



Something I especially appreciated about *Opera Mouse* is that there is no pressure on any child who doesn't want to join in – those that do are up on the stage in no time, those that don't can enjoy the show from their seats with their families. Neither Melanie nor Eden ever patronises their audience – their quickfire repartee works because it's

simple, funny and includes a lot of repetition, but the children are treated as equals, and it works;

'Have you ever chewed on a table leg? Why not? Okay, don't try this at home.'

In between – and so subtly that you hardly notice – Melanie brings in Mozart ('When do you think he started writing music? No he wasn't 5, he was 4 – but 5 is good. '), breath control, emotion ('let's sing this happy, then angry, then happy'... [child] 'what about hot?' 'Good idea – let's sing it hot!') and a few beautifully sung arias of her own. And neither she nor Eden is afraid of questions;

[Child]: 'Why does a horse gallop?'

[Melanie]: 'I guess because he's scared of a mouse.'

*Opera Mouse* is the best children's show I have seen in many years; it was packed out, so book early.

*Opera Mouse* is at Pleasance Courtyard/The Green (Venue 33) at 4.30pm every day until Friday 17 August. Tickets are available [here](#) or from the Pleasance Box Office.

Eden Ballantyne can also be seen in *A Dragon in the Family* and *Grimm's Fairer Tales*, both also at Venue 33, until 19 August.

Melanie Gall can also be seen in *Stitch in Time*, *A Knitting*

*Cabaret* and *Piaf and Brel, The Impossible Concert*, both at theSpace @ Surgeons' Hall (Venue 53) until 17 August.