

Review: Matilda The Musical

Roald Dahl was one of the most prominent British novelist, poet and screenwriters of the 20th century so when one of his many books – *Matilda* – inspired a musical it carried with it a ‘must-see’ tag.

Matilda the Musical, from the Royal Shakespeare Company, opened at the Edinburgh Playhouse this week and as the winner of a multitude of awards worldwide its reputation went before it.

Dahl’s book was written in 1988 and has a thoroughly modern feel to it. I’m usually rather wary of musicals based on books – the beauty of the written word is it is left to one’s imagination to envisage the story – but this musical certainly does it justice.

Matilda Wormwood, played quite brilliantly by Scarlett Cecil, is a five-year-old girl of unusual precocity with astonishing intellectual abilities – not that

this impresses her
parents, played Rebecca Thornhill and Sebastien Torkia,
loveable but
intellectually challenged ('you're reading books? What's wrong
with the
telly?!') Matilda gets up to all kinds of pranks such as
gluing her father's
hat to his head and bleaching her pater's hair in acts of
reprisal for her
parents being so horrible to her.

At school she forms
a friendship with teacher Miss Jennifer Honey, played by Carly
Thoms. However,
the school's headmistress, the tyrannical Agatha Trunchbull,
brilliantly played
by Elliot Harper is as equally unimpressed by Matilda's unique
talent as Mr and
Mrs Wormwood who are of the notion they wish their child
hadn't been born at
all. Mr Wormwood refers to Matilda throughout as 'boy'.

Trunchbull dislikes
the children at her school – in fact, she dislikes *all*
children and threatens them with all kinds of punishment.

Matilda's running
fabricated story to library worker Mrs Phelps, played by
Michelle Chantwell
Hopewell, about an escapologist and acrobat underpins the
show. There are frequent
scenes with Mrs Phelps in the library, sat on a stool whilst
battling with her
emotions as Matilda relays chapter after chapter of the story
of the two
characters she has contrived. Or has she contrived? There's a
wee twist in the
tale towards the end.

Matilda displays a mischievous streak throughout, but this is underpinned by a sense of innocence – and as a grandfather of five little horrors I understand this all too well!

The musical is energetic from the start. The opening number – ‘*My mummy says I’m a miracle*’ – is chanted with gusto by the ensemble and gets the show off to a feet-stomping start.

Most of the action takes place at Matilda’s school and the superb *School Song* with its dazzling visuals and choreography is one of the highlights of the evening. The songs fit the story perfectly with numbers such as *When I Grow Up*, *Telly*, *The Smell of Rebellion* and *My House*.

Matilda the Musical has everything one wants from a night at the theatre. It is emotive, energetic, very funny and visually spectacular. The choreography is mightily impressive. All of the cast are superb, but a special mention must go to the leading lady. Scarlett Cecil was absolutely faultless as Matilda and worthy of the standing ovation she received at the end of the show. Here’s a young lady who is bound for stardom.

With the Easter holidays looming this would be the ideal show to take your children to – they will love it. They may laugh, they may even feel they want to cry but, above all, they will feel thoroughly entertained. Roald Dahl died in 1990 but his legacy lives on. Had he still been around to see this musical adaptation, I have no doubt he would have approved.

Matilda the Musical is on at the Edinburgh Playhouse until Saturday 27th April 2019. Tickets [here](#).

Edinburgh Reporter rating: *****