



[The Lion King](#)
at The Palace Theatre

Reviewed by [Sara Porter](#) December 2012

It's nearly twenty years since the story of Simba the lion cub of Disney's animated story **The Lion King**, first graced our screens. Simba's story from eager young lion cub who "**Just Can't Wait To Be King**" and is driven into exile having been convinced by his wicked uncle Scar that he is responsible for the death of his father.

Simba's journey takes him to the jungle where he befriends a meerkat and warthog, and a chance meeting with his childhood friend Nala awakens in him the need to return home to reclaim the throne from Scar, and return the Pridelands to their former glory.

As unlikely as it may have sounded when the idea was first mooted, the musical of ***The Lion King*** which first opened in 1997 on Broadway, has taken what should be an almost impossible idea and made it a multi-award winning piece of musical theatre. Crossing a range of musical and dance styles. Director Julie Taymor's vision transfers superbly to stage.

It should be appreciated that using the multi-talented Taymor was integral to making the show such a success as with her directing skill, she also brought with her, her talents in puppetry and costume design. Utilising these talents was a stroke of genius as the costumes for the leads involve using headdresses to represent the characters, and incorporates choreography which strongly embeds characteristics of the animals movement in the movement of the actors. Her use of puppetry to cover aspects such as the wildebeest stampede or animals hunting in the grasslands means that parts that you would expect to be implied off stage are in fact still visually possible - and more importantly work.

Also integral to this staging are three key factors, all of which ***The Lion King*** has got right and they are the set design, lighting and costumes. Who'd have believed that on a wet miserable December evening you could step off Oxford Road and into the African grasslands or that you could have an elephant walking through the stalls at the Palace Theatre.

The Lion King is a musical and visual feast crossing a range of genres of musical theatre. Whilst under the main influence of African dance and rhythms, that is by no means the only style to feature. Choreographer Garth Fagan has incorporated modern, ballet, hip hop and of course African dance into the show, ensuring that there is something for everyone.

Like the dance the music, whilst heavily African influenced, incorporates a variety of styles including the rocky '**Chow Down**', the well known '**Circle of Life**', the Oscar winning '**Can You Feel the Love Tonight**

', the family favourite '

Hakuna Matata

', listen out for the unexpected The Proclaimers '

I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)

' and everyone's favourite '

The Lion Sleeps Tonight

'.



A multi-talented cast carry the show superbly, and it is almost impossible to pick out individual performances (and that includes the ensemble). The adult Simba (Nicholas Nkuna) and Mufasa (Cleveland Cathnott) play their kings with strength and thoughtfulness, the adult Nala (Carole Stennett) whose vocals are stunning on '**Shadowlands**' plays her role with grace and strength.

Comic moments are wonderfully provided by Scar (Stephen Carlile) and his hyaena henchmen (Gbemisola Ikulemo, Daniel Norford and Philip Oakland) and of course by Timon (John Hasler) and Pumbaa (Mark Roper) and not forgetting Zazu (Meilyr Sion) the hornbill majordomo.

The two child leads for the night were impressive (there is a rotation in the child leads). Auden Barnes making his professional debut, played the young Simba with wonderful wide-eyed curiosity and playfulness, and Donica Elliston showed great sass playing his childhood best friend Nala. A special mention should go to Gugwana Dlamini as Rafiki, a truly entertaining character that is played with great humour and with a great voice.

At the launch of ***The Lion King*** earlier this year, Disney were very keen to emphasise that the show tour would be the full version of the show and not a watered down version. Not having seen the West End version, I am unable to comment on that, other than to say that I don't know how they could possibly pack anymore into it.

So would I recommend it? Quite simply yes, as a show it contains enough variety to keep everyone happy and that includes the person I went with who is most assuredly not a musical fan but he said he would happily go again (high praise indeed!). The Lion King is a beautifully crafted piece of musical theatre which at over two hours long may not be suitable for the youngest family, although saying that the children in the audience seemed suitably in awe. On a typically wet, miserable Manchester evening, I couldn't think of anything better to see.

The Lion King is recommended for a general audience. As an advisory to adults who might bring young people, Disney recommends The Lion King for ages 6 and up. Children under the age of 3 will not be admitted into the theatre. All persons entering the theatre, regardless of age, must have a ticket.

Tickets from £20 - £75, to Sunday 31st March 2013

Tue 7.30pm

Wed 2.30pm & 7.30pm

Thu 7.30pm

Fri 7.30pm

Sat 2.30pm & 7.30pm

Sun 2.30pm

Mon - no performances

Running time: 2hrs 30m including one interval