



## [Our Gracie](#) at [Oldham Coliseum](#)

by Philip Goulding, Directed by Kevin Shaw

Reviewed by [John Waterhouse](#) March 2016

I went to Oldham Coliseum Theatre knowing nothing about Gracie Fields except that she was a famous singer cum film star somewhere around the 1930's, and I suspect that the same could be said today for at least half the population. ***Our Gracie*** is a bio-play that aims to remind the world that such a great and popular talent existed, faithfully telling the life story of Rochdale's most famous daughter. It's also a fun show, in which all the cast take it in turns to play various musical instruments whilst portraying a wide range of real people from Gracie's life, including several very funny cameo roles.

With over twenty songs, all from different periods in Gracie's eighty-one year life, the show not only brings together a genuine 'rags to riches' story but reproduces a whole era, starting in regional music halls and going on to big London revue shows and 1930's and 40's glamour and

razzamatazz, with a set that very much caught the overall style for the period as well as allowing for a lot of minimalist theatre to cover both the time period and varied locations. It's a world that is in so many ways no longer with us and this gives the show an added validity, both as a nostalgic reminder for older audience members and an introduction to something of which those below a certain age will probably have no knowledge.



Inevitably, a show like this stands to a fair extent upon its leading actor and perhaps it is because she also hails from Rochdale that **Sue Devaney** appeared to taken on the role of Gracie as a labour of love, delivering the songs with gusto, whilst also providing a superb characterisation, capturing the humour and the spirit of Gracie. It must be said though that she was excellently supported by a very able cast who each had their moments, delivering comedy and at times, a little sadness as well.

### **Matthew Ganley**

in particular gave some great pieces of theatre, which I will refrain from listing so as not to give any spoilers.

Credit must also be given to **Ben Stock**, who as well as holding most of the music together on the piano, gave for me, possibly the most amusing role of the night with a brilliant impersonation of *Liberace*. In short though, all the cast were great and seemed to be enjoying themselves as much as the audience. In keeping with the themes of the show, some music hall devices were imaginatively used to tell the story but again, I won't give any spoilers.

It is worth noting that Rochdale is in the process of erecting both a statue to Gracie Fields and setting up a walk around the town, with plaques to mark various places associated with the town's famous daughter and perhaps in time, the name 'Gracie Fields' will have a wider public profile. Around 1940, when Gracie Fields required two operations, she received no less than 250,000 get well letters, a show of feeling which would now be hard to have equalled, given the ease of using social media. She continued to be a popular and highly paid entertainer well after her heyday in the 1930's, still performing until just before her death. 'Our Gracie' is a fitting tribute and also a great night out.

**'Our Gracie'** runs until Saturday 26th March.