



## [SHREK](#) - Palace Theatre

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) January 2018

Dreamworks Theatricals presented their stage version of the hit children's film, Shrek, this evening at Manchester Palace Theatre. With the same company behind this as the original film, then one would have thought it would have been stunning and engaging. One would have expected the children in the audience, (of whom there were many), to be thrilled and laughing all the way. Since this was not the case, then something clearly was not quite right.

Well, we had a small technical hitch at the start of the show which delayed proceedings a little, but that should not have been enough for us to have witnessed a rather tired and staid first half which, although it had its moments, was somewhat flat. Judging by the lack of audience response and enjoyment from those within ear and eye shot, I was not alone in thinking this either. Boredom had set in amongst the youngsters, and the adults had switched off.

Fortunately I have to say that the second act was much better. Faster, slicker, funnier, better written perhaps, but certainly far more engaging and suddenly the audience were awake and on board. We had laughter and wide eyes throughout the second half. If the production had started in that vein, by the end of act two the audience would have been jumping up and down in their seats and eating out of the palms of your hands, but hey, that wasn't the case this evening.

The story of Shrek, for those of us who have somehow managed to miss this gem of a film, concerns quite unsurprisingly, an ogre called Shrek. Ogres are big, green, smelly and fart a lot, and also keep themselves apart from humans since humans want to hunt them and call them freaks. However, our hero and protagonist ogre Shrek befriends a donkey being hounded out of town for being able to talk - indeed all the fairytale characters living in the town have been ordered out and evicted, to live in the swamp that Shrek calls home.

Shrek goes to the town to try and get the Lord to give him back his swamp and let him live in peace and quiet. However, the Lord is looking to find a princess to marry so that he can make himself King and has been told of a beautiful princess who has been locked away in a room atop a high tower guarded by a fire-breathing dragon. He needs someone to go and rescue her for him. Obviously he gives this challenge to Shrek saying that he will give the deeds of the swamp to him on completion of the task.

It is actually a rather lovely - if not predictable - fairy story, but whereas some tales can have rather obscure meanings, the message in this story is clear, and one that every child should

grow up with. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder; and that you simply don't need to have a supermodel body to be beautiful and to be loved. It's a heart-warming message which has the 'ah' factor, but comes a little too late in this Musical which was somewhat too long for the target audience, and failed to fully engage them throughout.

**Steffan Harri** was our hero Shrek this evening. Looking and sounding like the film version he made for a very personable and likeable ogre. He just lacked a certain pizzazz, and during the first act at least I felt he was simply going through the motions and not really 'feeling it'.

**Laura Main**

as Princess Fiona tried her damndest to inject some comedy and fun into her part, but I felt that perhaps she was trying too hard, since either the script or the director, or perhaps both wouldn't allow her to be as funny as she so obviously wanted to be.

**Marcus Ayton**

on the other hand was full of fun and we all loved the comedy antics of the Donkey. Ayton was the only character during the first act to truly impress.

Lord Farquaad, played by **Samuel Holmes** had the comedy timing and skills aplenty to be truly hilarious as well as malevolent but again, sadly, I felt that someone was holding the reins in his performance. Playing the vast majority of the part on his knees (poor chap!) he could have been - and yes, should have been - hilarious, and indeed the potential was there. A very proficient and talented actor who was not allowed to shine. Again I can only think that this is down to the director, **Nigel Harman**, for not allowing the actors to explore their characters more.

The show utilised a talented ensemble who played fairy-tale creatures multifarious as well as all-singing, all-dancing palace guards. The costumes were colourful and funny, and I enjoyed their routines. I am uncertain though as to why Pinocchio was asked to speak in such a ridiculous falsetto voice. I was also left wondering this evening why some of the cast - including

the donkey - spoke with American accents. That simply didn't make any sense to me either.

The sets were good, helped by some creative lighting, but the highlight of the evening came in the form of the fire-breathing Dragon. A superbly designed puppet which filled the stage and was handled by several puppeteers all dressed in black. Clever, excellently thought-out and designed, and expertly handled.

With music by Jeanine Tesori and David Lindsay-Abaire (book and lyrics), played this evening by a live band under the direction of **Colm O'Regan**, the songs were full and lush, but sadly the melodies were instantly forgettable. The book, and indeed the music, very reminiscent of the Off-Broadway style of Musical (Spelling Bee / Avenue Q etc), which somehow seemed wrong for a big budget high profile show such as this.