



**[Runaway Shadows](#) at [Contact](#)**

based on a story by Lyman Frank Baum and directed by Nick Clarke  
Produced by Contact Young Actors Company and Fink On Theatre  
Reviewed by [Julia Taylor](#) December 2012

On the night I saw Runaway Shadows at the Contact Theatre, Manchester it was an accessible performance for deaf people with an interpreter using British Sign Language. I wondered if this might distract hearing people from the performance but I'm glad to say that after the first few minutes we didn't notice her and she must have been a boon to those who can't hear.

Runaway Shadows is based on a 20th century fairy tale by Lyman Frank Baum, author of the Wizard of Oz, in which the shadows of royalty are stolen by Jack Frost. **Contact Young Actors Company** and **Fink on Theatre** have substituted royalty for Manchester's young homeless people though there is no discrimination when it comes to stealing shadows!

Nick Clarke, the Artistic Director of *Fink on Theatre*, who has worked in all areas of theatre both in the UK and Europe, directs the dynamic young people from CYAC, known for their ability to innovate. This is abundantly clear in *Runaway Shadows*.

As in Baum's original fairy story, Jack Frost (Nathan Wright) has a field day. In this version, set three days before Christmas and very cold, Jack goes further than making fingers and toes dead, by mischievously freezing shadows and removing them from their owners.

It is the highlight of the evening when the original story of Jack Frost and the characters of a prince (Vinicus Terra who also becomes the great tiger, Burzee) and his cousin, Lady Lindiva (Leanne Lucy Nicholls) and their shadows, appear in silhouette behind a screen. The reference to Jack Frost eating icicles for breakfast along with some Frosties gets a good laugh.

The central figure is Isabelle, a newly homeless young person, who has been kicked out by her family. Roxanne Browne plays the role with sensitivity as she becomes the fulcrum of the play. A stranger from London, her character joins a group of young people in Manchester who are sleeping rough. All have heartrending stories to tell. She (and we) jump when Adam (Abdus Munim) emerges from a bundle of quilts. The two become friends.

Adam tells her of how he jumped off a play school roof landing awkwardly damaging his private parts. This prompts her to recount the *Runaway Shadows* story. Probably because of her uneasy sleep in the open on the coldest night of the year, Isabelle appears to have her own

shadow snatched. This again, is cleverly done as she stands in front of the screen, her shadow behind her.

There is a lovely scene when the young people reflect the sounds of Manchester including a Metrolink announcement on the Oldham Mumps service. There can be no doubt about the city in which this play is set.

This production has hidden depths. One is the tight definition of homelessness followed by the Council. Isabelle doesn't qualify and has to join a long waiting list for a home. The other, spelled out loud and clear, is that people need people.