

 **Spoonface Steinberg** by Lee Hall at St John and St Peter RC Primary School Reviewed by John Waterhouse July 2016

The idea of a play dealing with suffering from cancer might ordinarily sound potentially inspiring but essentially sad. The idea of a very young girl, and an autistic child at that, having cancer would probably suggest a depressing story. Add to that, the protagonist having a firm identity of being from a persecuted minority and you could be forgiven for thinking that this will be a grim tale indeed.

Yet, somehow, **Spoonface Steinberg** takes all these factors and weaves them into a play that is inspiring, uplifting and frequently funny. It takes several issues which adults find difficult to deal with and presents them through the eyes of an innocent child with an indefatigable spirit, a wry sense of humour and an ability to see positives in almost anything.

The writer, **Lee Hall**, has had a very varied career including the screenplays for **War Horse** and **Billy Elliot**, several theatre adaptations of well-known works such as **Mother Courage** and **The Barber of Seville** and numerous radio plays, including **Spoonface Steinberg** (which is how this work first appeared in 1997). Adapted later for the stage, this is a powerful play which keeps a constant pace, never falling into heavy drama as **Spoonface** takes us through her life experiences and her very individual takes on living with illness, disability, racism and family issues.

Spoonface though, has too much personality and vibrancy for us to remain hung up for too long on any one subject as she keeps moving us along from one aspect of her life to another, making the kind of wry observations that have a special poignancy because she clearly has none of the kind of biases or hidden agendas that so often are the thinking of an adult.

Through a combination of clever make-up and superb acting, **Rebecca Fenwick** brings **Spoonface** to life in a way that really makes you believe you are watching a child telling her story. The close-up interaction with the audience makes this a very personal piece of theatre and there is a real engagement between the performer and the theatre-goer. Even during moments of silence, an atmosphere of eager anticipation is created as the audience waits to see **Spoonface**'s feelings and emotions reveal another slice of her complicated and severely challenged life.

One of the most interesting and enjoyable aspects of this play is that once you have been given a grounding to both **Spoonface**'s character and situations, you can really buy into her takes on life, which often give pause for thought as to how we react to our own adversities. **Spoonface Steinberg** is ultimately a joy to watch and the kind of play that will still have you pondering different aspects of it long after watching the performance.

This play was a genuine pleasure to watch and strangely uplifting, considering the subject matter. If you think you've got problems and find it difficult to face the world with a smile, watch **Spoonface Steinberg**. You come away pleasantly surprised, with food for thought.

Spoonface Steinberg will be touring in the North West of England early next year; for details of future performances, please visit the theatre company website - www.chinstrapproductions.co.uk