



[The Little Matchgirl](#) at Buxton Opera House

Written by Joel Horwood and adapted with Emma Rice from stories by Hans Christian Andersen

Reviewed by [John Waterhouse](#) March 2018

I went along to Buxton Opera House with an open mind, expecting to see a fairly entertaining children's show and can only say it just shows how wrong you be sometimes. *The Little Match Girl* is a pure delight, encompassing action theatre, folk music, comedy, pathos, dance and a lot more. Yes, children will enjoy this spectacular journey through the stories of Hans Christian Andersen but this is unquestionably a show for adults. Dickensian settings and costumes blend with bang up-to-date satire, and folk music from the 16th and 17th centuries is interspersed with easy-listening songs from the 60's and 70's.

The Little Match Girl maintains a fast pace from start to finish, and with a cast of ten performers, including actor/musicians, the feel is of a big show with impressive backdrops and an excellent assortment of props and effects. The only thing which perhaps did not quite work was the use of some scaffolding, which seemed to jar with the otherwise consistent 19th century look of both costumes and sets. This is a small gripe though because the two levels were used to good effect and there was so much else on stage to catch the eye.

It is worth noting that Andersen met Charles Dickens because as this show ably demonstrates, his stories are not such fairy tales but touch on the social unfairness and injustices of the time. It could be said that Hans Christian Andersen was trying to cover many of the same messages as Dickens using a different genre.

The Little Match Girl is in some ways presented as an olde time like a music hall experience, with asides to the audience and topical comments whilst remaining rooted in the Victorian time of Andersen. Stand out performances included **Niall Ashdown**, excellent as Old Shuteye, effectively the compere but with a memorable turn as the Emporer, and

Katy Owen

who showed remarkable versatility as various Andersen characters, some of which were very funny.

Guy Hughes

and

Karl Queensborough

also put in some great turns, notably as two signing beetles. There really was a magical little world created on stage and the animation of the puppet by

Edie Edmundson

was remarkable; somehow you could not help really caring about what your head kept you telling was just a marionette.

The musicians deserve special mention because they provided so much more than mere accompaniment to a varied selection of songs. Several of the moods created were simply exquisite with others giving pure energy, with a showcase of styles including jazz, folk, ragtime and a few acoustic re-workings of both pop and popular music. The core band of a double-bass and two guitarists (cum banjo and madelin players) moved round the stage from scene to scene, forming an integral part of the theatrical experience, sometimes joined by cast members on the violin, and even the slide-whistle. *The Little Match Girl* under the musical direction of **Jon**

Gingell

was a very enjoyable musical experience.

The Little Match Girl is a must see. The very strong, skilled & talented cast take you on a journey that touches every part of your heart. The set, lighting & sound are perfection and the Direction second to none. The merger of puppetry, music, talented actors & musicians was a joy to watch and hear. In a world of reworked Musicals, take this opportunity to see something original & refreshingly heartfelt. The ending is something to behold.

***The Little Match Girl* is on at Buxton Opera House until Saturday 10th March as part of a national tour.**