



[CILLA: The Musical](#)

at Palace Theatre

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) November 2017

This is the story of how one of Britain's most popular and enduring pop singers and later TV personality managed to climb that rocky road from working as an office typist and living in a terraced house in Liverpool in the early 1960's. Born Priscilla White, she had, at the age of 25, two number 1 hits, and the world (or at least the UK at that point) knew her as Cilla Black.

This true story is based, not on a fresh and clean look at her career, but instead on a TV programme of the same name from three years ago, when the redoubtable Sheridan Smith starred as Cilla. Thus making things a little more complicated than perhaps they may have been.

This is most definitely a book Musical though, and it is all the better for it. Some lovely dialogue between songs which helped to bring her story well and truly to life. Personally I would have liked a little more dialogue to compliment the story, but since the Musical was already three hours long - too long actually - then the only way this would have been possible would have been to have cut a couple of the songs.

The Musical starts in 1962 and her being introduced to Brian Epstein by Ringo Starr, and finishes just before she becomes a household TV name. This is the young Cilla, the Cilla in fact that I never knew or was really ever aware of. I grew up knowing only of Cilla Black, host of Surprise, Surprise and Blind Date!

With a rather minimalistic but adequate set, we went from Cavern Club to Cilla's living room, to Manager's Office etc, and the scene changes somehow seemed to take for ever. There was one occasion at least where our two protagonists were standing facing forwards as if waiting for a bus, whilst the set slowly changed behind them. The lighting was mostly good - I particularly enjoyed the Ed Sullivan Show sequence - but some of the lights shining directly into the audience could have been cut.

The Musical stands or falls however on really only one performance; and that of course is the driving force behind and the reason for this show, the actress playing Cilla Black. After doing some you-tubing this morning to compare her with the genuine article, then I can honestly say you would have had to have gone a very long way to have found someone better. **Kara Lily Hayworth**

simply WAS Cilla, and her rendition of the song Anyone Who Had A heart which closed Act 1 was spine-chillingly good.

The young and devoted young lad who fancied Cilla, and then spent the rest of his time as her rock, her second manager, and eventually her husband, Bobby, was an excellently measured and consistent performance as he grew in age and confidence throughout. A lovely and truthful performance by **Carl Au**.

Andrew Lancel gave another very truthful and sincere performance as Brian Epstein, a manager who had to 'hide his love away', and eventually paid for it with his own life. A very touching performance. A special mention too must go to **Neil McDonald** as Cilla's father. A very likeable and personable performance.

Along with Cilla's hits we are treated to songs by The Beatles, Jerry and The Pacemakers, and The Mamas and The Papas, but be warned, the volume is turned up way too high the whole evening. It felt like I was in the same room as an elderly deaf relative with the TV on maximum volume, tearing at my eardrums.

There could have been more movement too in this Musical. There was only one somewhat half-hearted dance (Dancing In The Street), in a Musical lasting three hours in duration, with a large ensemble cast who did nothing but mill around and sway their bodies gently to the music. Surely the 60s era was the era of choreographed routines with known movements for certain songs, and couldn't we at least have suspended our disbelief a little further to have the spectacle of dance within the show?

However, this is a Musical which is full of nostalgia and will undoubtedly appeal to those old enough to have any recollection of the sixties and the music of that time. As Musical's of this ilk go then, it isn't the best by any means but it certainly isn't the worst either, and the three starring performers make it extremely watchable and accessible, and if you knew little or nothing of Cilla's early life and career prior to seeing the show, like me, then you will also learn a little something too!