

Review: 'Roald Dahl's Matilda: The Musical' at South Valley Civic Theatre (**)



This truly terrific chorus of kids is the highlight of South Valley Civic Theatre's production of "Roald Dahl's Matilda: The Musical." Photo Credit: SVCT.

[by Otto Coelho](#)



Reviewed by a voting member of the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle.

Roald Dahl is a very special author for me. My sister introduced me to "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" when I was young, and – though it was still a children's book – it was the first book I'd ever read that I would truly consider to be a novel. I had liked reading up until then, and was a Scholastic Book Service devotee (for those of you not of advanced years, Scholastic issued small catalogues of books to buy to one's grammar school class. You ordered books and brought a check

from your mom to pay for them, and after what seemed eleventy-billion years your books arrived). Dahl's characters and narrative quickly turned me into a lifelong lover of reading.

For their final show of their 2022 – 2023 season, South Valley Civic Theatre is presenting “Roald Dahl’s Matilda” The Musical.” I must admit I was unfamiliar with this particular book as well as this musical stage version, which was originally produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2010.

Producing a musical with a cast of a majority of child actors can sometimes be problematic. This production, however, does not suffer one bit. In fact, the chorus of terrific kids in SVCT’s “Matilda” are the real strength of this production. From the very first number, the chorus of kids offer high energy, strong focus, and vocal power. They are just fantastic performers, and should be proud of their work!

Heading up the cast in the performance I saw is Izabel Stevens as Matilda (she alternates with Lucy Sky Levi-Longini). Ms. Stevens sings beautifully and is well suited for the role. Evandra Aurelia gives a strong performance as Miss Jennifer Honey, Matilda’s teacher. She has a great voice and offers some lovely moments. As Matilda’s mother Zinnia, Colleen Havey is hilarious. The best number in the show has to “When I Grow Up,” staged with the kids chorus and Ms. Aurelia taking turns on four swings on the bare stage. It was wonderfully effective.

This is not to say the show doesn’t have issues—it does. Director Geoffrey Ward needed to do a bit more to keep the pace from dragging, especially in the second act. Scenic design by Kate Longini Pratt was inconsistent, and mainly consisted of individual pieces of furniture being brought on and taken off with every scene. This contributed heavily to the pacing issues. A lot of the time, the chorus stood in lines, facing forward and singing directly to the audience rather than relating to each other. Costumes by Kimberly Lynch worked well.

So there’s a mix of things that work in SVCT’s “Roald Dahl’s Matilda The Musical,” and some things that are challenging. If the kids in the show are any indication of the future of South Valley Civic Theatre, it promises to be bright!

“Roald Dahl’s Matilda: The Musical” continues through July 15th at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. [For more information, click here.](#)

*[Rating: ** \(For an explanation of TheatreStorm’s rating scale, click here.\)](#)*

“Matilda The Musical” tells story of child abuse with thoughtfulness

<https://morganhilllife.com/2023/07/02/svct-matilda-2/>

Show will make you think and wonder how deep and true it might be in some areas.

By Camille Bounds. Published online July 2, 2023



Photo courtesy South Valley Civic Theatre

Children’s story writer Ronald Dahl’s beloved novel “Matilda” tells the story of an abused young girl who is gifted with psychokinetic powers and handles all the terrible neglect with an abundance of charm, wit and an ability to “always make things right.”

A Royal Shakespeare Company production from London with music and words by Tim Minchin with the book by Dennis Kelly, “Matilda the Musical” brings a unique kind of theater that touches the imagination and creates roads you might not want to transverse. Winner of five Tony Awards in 2013 and seven Oliver Awards in 2012 reinforces the fact that they must be doing something right.

The show spews scores of talented children who recreate choreographer Christine Carrillo’s intricate choreography. Heading it all up and in almost every scene in the June 30 show is Lucy Sky Levy who plays the five-year-old “Matilda.” She is an amazing actress, singer and dancer who owns the stage every moment she is on. (Izabel Stevens also plays “Matilda” in alternate shows because it’s a demanding role and I’ve been told she is just as talented.

Geoffrey Ward directs with a velvet glove and gives his actors the leeway needed to deliver the show’s unique plot. Tressa Bender carries the role of the terrorizing head mistress “Miss Agatha Trunchbull”

who makes all other villains we know milquetoast. Matilda's dimwitted parents, played by Jason Eves and Colleen Havey, makes you want to call a child abuse hotline. Evandra Aurelia (with a stunning voice) as "Miss Honey" who understands what Matilda's abilities are gives the few soft gentle moments in the performance.

The real scene stealer after Miss Honey are the marvelous sets by Kate Logni Pratts group with desks that slide a class room on and off the stage by the moment, with a delightful number with swings, a magic blackboard. The stagehands really get a workout with this production. Music director Ron Bowman leads a fine 10-piece orchestra that completes the show.

"Matilda" will give you a bumpy, heart-wrenching ride into a favorite children's tale with music and clever lyrics. It will also make you think and wonder how deep and true it might be in some areas.

South Valley Civic Theatre's 'Matilda' brings childhood joys, struggles to the stage

[Musical stars two young performers](#)

By: [Erik Chalhoub](#)

June 14, 2023



Lucy Levy-Longini (Matilda) and Evandra Aurelia (Miss Honey) interact in "Matilda the Musical." Photo: Chris Foster

Generations of families have grown up with the wacky and whimsical works of Roald Dahl, engrossed in the tales of impossibly large peaches, Wonka Bars and friendly giants.

South Valley Civic Theatre is drawing from the mind of the literary icon, bringing a young genius with psychokinetic powers to local audiences.

Two of them, in fact.

“Roald Dahl’s *Matilda the Musical*” opens June 23 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, running select days through July 15.

Matilda, who lives with her cruel parents, dreams of a better life. She befriends her teacher, Miss Honey, but faces the wrath of her school’s headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, who is constantly scheming new punishments for children who don’t conform to the rules.

SVCT’s adaptation of the musical features two actors playing Matilda, who perform in alternate days: Izabel Stevens and Lucy Levy-Longini.

Izabel, 10, said she has previously performed in her school plays, such as a squirrel in “*Willy Wonka*” and Belle in “*Beauty and the Beast*,” and is making her debut with a community theater. She noted that she has to alter her voice to imitate the younger Matilda, while also acting with confidence to portray the “very smart” character.

“The producers are very kind to us,” Izabel said. “It’s a hard show to do. They’re always encouraging us.”

She hopes the performance will inspire others to follow Matilda’s lead by being organized and staying on top of things, and maybe even learn to not procrastinate on that math homework.

“It can inspire people to be great,” she said. “Maybe they can find a new hobby or career later in life through acting.”

Lucy, 9, who is also a veteran of the stage, is playing her first lead role with “*Matilda*.”

“I’m excited,” she said. “It’s a lot of pressure on my shoulders. I have to learn a lot of things. It’s a hard role, but it’s very fun.”

She added that she loves all the characters in the show, especially Matilda, who she refers to as a “tiny genius who’s very confident and more of a leader than a follower.”

“We worked really hard,” Lucy said. “It has amazing singing and choreography. It’s a great show altogether.”

Standing in Matilda’s way is her self-centered parents, Harry and Zinnia Wormwood, played by Jason Eves and Colleen Havey.

Eves called Mr. Wormwood “absolutely nasty, and pretty rotten through and through,” who aims to make Matilda’s life miserable.

As an actor, Eves admitted it has been difficult “channeling this vitriol” and yelling at the children during rehearsals. But the character also has plenty of humorous moments that are at his own expense, and is subjected to Matilda’s constant pranks.

Havey, as a mother and teacher herself, said she faced similar challenges with playing such a cruel character.



Tressa Bender (Miss Trunchbull) and Izabel Stevens (Matilda) star in "Roald Dahl's Matilda the Musical," opening June 23 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. Photo: Chris Foster

"You have to play the part and know that it's not who you really are," she said. "It's actually really fun to play."

Havey said generations of children have fallen in love with the story of Matilda, and predicted "everybody in the audience will want to sing along."

Eves agreed.

"The number one thing that pulls me back to 'Matilda' every time is how amazing the music is," he said. "We have an amazing orchestra. Our children know this music backward and forward, and it's so fun to watch them perform."

Matilda forms a friendship with her teacher, Miss Jennifer Honey, played by Evandra Aurelia.

Aurelia said the two characters find common threads in both of their lives that allows them to connect with each other.

Aurelia, a voice teacher who also acts as a profession, said she found it seamless to perform with the two different Matildas.

"I'm extremely impressed with our Matildas," she said. "Our actors really captured the essence of each character. It's super fun."

Mary Beth Anderson and Marilyn Pifer are the co-producers of "Matilda the Musical."

Anderson said Izabel and Lucy bring their own personalities to the role of Matilda, giving each performance a unique feel.

Both co-producers said they were impressed with how the young actors have taken on such a big responsibility.

"It's enough dialogue for an adult to struggle with, and you're asking young kids to take on this task," Anderson said. "It's huge. These two are lucky to have very supportive parents."

"Everyone is stepping up beautifully," Pifer said. "I'm particularly excited about the performances the children actors are putting in. They've got so much spunk and talent and enthusiasm. It's really a joy to see."

Entertainment: ‘Matilda’ is SVCT family show full of courage, hope

[Musical follows magical 5-year-old who forges a better life for herself](#)

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Photo by Chris Foster

By Calvin Nuttall

South Valley Civic Theatre audiences will experience the magic of imagination with their latest production “Matilda the Musical.” The show tells the story of a 5-year-old girl who stands up in the face of abuse to prove bravery, tenacity and intelligence can triumph over cruelty.

Directed by Geoffrey Ward, the show opens June 23 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse. It's based on the award-winning 1988 children's novel "Matilda" by Roald Dahl, which has also been adapted into films in 1996 and 2022.

Leading an ensemble cast of all ages, the role of "Matilda" is shared by Izabel Stevens and Lucy Levy-Longini, who will take turns portraying the fiery youngster.

"She's very brave, and she likes to stand up for herself," Stevens said. "She's been traumatized a lot, but she knows that she has to write her own story, and people can't write it for her."



Photo by Chris Foster

Matilda's attitude draws the ire of the show's antagonist, her school's cruel headmistress "Miss Trunchbull." Trunchbull holds disdain for children and delights in dreaming up new ways to punish troublemakers in order to "break" them. She is portrayed by Tressa Bender, who recently directed SVCT's children's show "Honk! Jr."

"Matilda is very smart and independent," Levy-Longini said. "But she has this horrible headmistress, and she is just terrible and evil. Basically, Matilda is the only one who is not scared of her, and all of the other children are, so she stands up for them."

The story escalates when Matilda discovers she has magical powers granting her the ability to move objects telekinetically. Naturally, this power is put to use for rebellion and humor.

"There is a lot going on in 'Matilda' when you look at it," Bender said. "It's a story about a child who is very ignored and very alone finding her voice, finding her people. It (her magical power) comes to her in the time of need when she feels the most desperate."

Full of pranks and magical mischief, the light tone of "Matilda" belies the seriousness of the topics it is built upon, particularly that of child abuse.

"It's about children having the power to rise above their abusers," Bender said. "There are a lot of funny moments, but it tackles very serious subjects. That give-and-take makes it a compelling and fun story, and something I think everybody will enjoy."

The musical is co-produced by SVCT board members Marilyn Pifer and Mary Beth Anderson.

"We're like yin and yang," Anderson said. "Nowadays, producing is such a task, with these shows getting more and more complicated, so I asked my friend, Marilyn, to help me. We do really well together."

"I don't know which of us is the yin and which is the yang," Pifer said. "But we complement each other's strengths and weaknesses pretty well."

The emergence of Matilda's magical powers midway through the story created a particular challenge for the production crew, Anderson said. To achieve the visual effect of telekinesis, they had to get creative using special effects that have never been tried on the Playhouse stage.

"We weren't exactly sure how we were going to pull it off," Pifer said. "There are a lot of moving parts in this production. There is a little bit of theatrical 'magic' in this show, and we need to make sure that the magic works correctly. No spoilers, but there are some cool things that happen."



Photo by Chris Foster

While she stressed the importance of addressing the serious topic of child abuse portrayed in "Matilda," Pifer also cautioned these moments in the show may be shocking to an unprepared viewer.

"There are some scenes where it will appear that children are being hurt," Pifer said. "They aren't. We take the safety of our cast very seriously, and it is all done with tricks. Just like the disclaimers at the end of movies, we can say, 'No children were harmed in the making of this show.'"

As excited as producers are for the practical effects, so too are the cast and crew looking forward to performing alongside an exceptional orchestra, Anderson said.

“The sound is going to be amazing,” she said. “We’re really excited to have received funding to bring in an orchestra of experienced musicians that have agreed to work with us. We are a musical theater, and we want to put on the best musical that we can. With the challenges of AB5, it has been very hard on community theaters.”

California’s Assembly Bill 5 (commonly known as the “gig-worker bill”), which went into effect in 2020, changed how many types of contract and freelance jobs are classified. This has had a limiting effect on the ways community theaters like SVCT can spend money on things like hiring musicians, Anderson said.

“It is very complex, but we are successfully navigating the restrictions,” she said. “There is a reason we have been around for 50 years, and it comes down to us being an all-volunteer organization. But times are changing, and we have a lot of challenges ahead of us. One theater after the next is folding because they can’t afford to stay in business.”

In spite of this, SVCT is growing, Pifer said. She cited the theater’s expanding base of popularity, attracting actors from beyond the immediate Morgan Hill and Gilroy communities to join the cast of “Matilda.”

“One of the things that has been very exciting is we have drawn a lot of folks into the cast who have never played at SVCT,” she said. “We still have local actors, but it is encouraging that people from outside our area were drawn to our community theater. That tells me SVCT must be doing something right.”