



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: BMYP

Name of Production: Matilda Jr

Venue: Backwell Playhouse

Date: 28th March 2025

Adjudicator: Laura Corradi Loughran

Matilda has become a popular choice with youth theatre groups, especially following its movie success. Musically appealing, despite its complexity, it offers a score that is vocally challenging, with complex rhythms for choreography, paired with the charm of the Roald Dahl story that we all know so well. The junior version unfortunately shortens many of the musical numbers, though with a group of performers as good as yours, it certainly left the audience wanting more. The familiarity of the characters offers a solid foundation for the performers, and the interpretation of character from your young actors was admirable. This was a high energy production, expertly directed and choreographed to showcase the best of these performers. Congratulations.

ACT ONE

The opening number, MIRACLE, delivered strong soloists with good characterisations and I particularly enjoyed the 'dressing up' style of costumes, from Scooby Doo to Elsa which provided additional interest. The company produced a full sound, and the simple routine worked well to accommodate the large number of performers. The use of clapping playground games and poses worked well, although the choreography of the 'kids' was lost once the parents were in front. The pose for the

photograph was well conceived. The balloons added visual height to the set, whilst the cake with candles allowed the scenario to be easily established.

The scene to follow at the Wormwoods, was again clearly defined with the use of the TV trolley down stage left, and the glow emitting from the TV was a great visual effect. Mr and Mrs Wormwood both quickly demonstrated their cruelty and impatience towards Matilda setting up the family dynamic well. There was some distortion from Harry's mic which seemed to be due to mic placement rather than sound issues. The timing of the underscore coming over Harry's talk about Miss Trunchbull was perfect, enhancing the sense of foreboding. Matilda excelled with her first solo number, NAUGHTY, with a clear vocal tone and a good attempt at facial expression. Her cheekiness came through. The continuation into tricks played on Mr Wormwood was fluid and well-conceived, whilst the reactions of Matilda and Mrs Wormwood throughout the scene clearly established the dysfunctional dynamic within the family.

The Library scene, again, offered an instant change in location with minimal need for elaborate scene changes, which allowed for good continuity, and I particularly enjoyed seeing scene changes carried out by cast/stagehands in school uniform. The acrobat and escapologist story was brought to life with enthusiastic storytelling by Matilda, effective movement (especially the well-controlled lift), beautiful white, gold and blue costumes, light up cubes as well as the addition of atmospheric haze.

Upon arrival at Crunchem hall, the SCHOOL SONG, was a visual treat, with sharp movement and excellent use of the space. The wooden chairs easily set the scene and were incorporated into the routine well. The use of the letters were expertly handled, from lining them up, moving them in different directions, poses and even finding a comedic moment with 'W' moving at the wrong times. The ensemble sound and diction here was excellent, although some of the solo lines without mics were a little lost. Miss Honey's classroom was an inviting space, and Miss Honey gave a warm and kind first impression, in contrast to the meeting of Miss Trunchbull. The collective expression of the ensemble at Matilda's extensive reading list was superb and a great example of all cast being fully invested within the scene. Miss Trunchbull gave a commanding appearance, supported by wonderful characterful costuming. THE HAMMER was well performed with comic expression from Miss Trunchbull, the ensemble harmony was vocally secure and the use of ribbons added to the staging of the number. The turn of the hammer, kids popping out of the wings, skipping, splits and trophy at the songs end filled the number with visual interest.

Back at the Wormwoods I enjoyed the vindictiveness when ripping up the book in order to fuel Matilda's revenge further, whilst Mrs Wormwoods sing-song tone when talking about Rudolpho brought a comedic contrast to the scene. NAUGHTY (REPRISE) was once again well sung and the gluing of the hat sketch well executed.

At Crunchem hall the many different playground activities were a visual treat, everywhere you looked on stage each member of the cast was fully engrossed within their games, from rock, paper, scissors, to various clapping games. THE CHOKEY CHANT was excellent with tight choreography, in particular the sharpness of the arm and hand gestures, ending with Matilda being lifted centre stage. The green lighting here was particularly effective. The piling of jumpers on Nigel was carried out with great efficiency. The Amanda doll illusion worked well with pupils running around to distract. Amanda's reappearance crawling on from the wings worked well, although the comedic value may have been enhanced had the doll been flung off the stage above ground level.

Harry performed the scene on the telephone well with good pausing to allow for a convincing conversation. At the house, Rudolpho performed with an abundance of energy and personality, making for a memorable scene with Mrs Wormwood (a great partnership). Rudolpho's change in accent from 'ciao' to 'what' was well done and I enjoyed his flamboyancy with 'calculate this' into the press ups.

THE LITTLE GIRL was sung well by Miss Honey who had a warm vocal tone and gave a sensitive performance, opting for the occasional breathy onset. The acting here was sincere and this was one of the moments where I wished the junior version allowed for longer versions of the songs. This led well into the scene furthering the tale of the escapologist which was beautifully lit creating a believable distance from the reality of the library. Mrs Phelps reactions to the story were excellent and her emotional investment opposite Matilda's dry and determined delivery was interesting.

The scene with Bruce and the chocolate cake was a standout section of the act. Bruce's burp and Miss Trunchbull smelling the chocolatey scent across the stage was perfectly timed. BRUCE was a choreographic splendour and showcased each dancer well. Pirouettes, kicks, strong arms, lines moving across the stage, it was kaleidoscopic. Placing Miss Trunchbull in front of Bruce allowed for discreet cake disappearance, whilst chocolate around Bruce's face and licking of his fingers added authenticity to the situation. The lighting change from reds to purples during the vocal 'ah's' section was striking. It was vocally strong and full of energy. Miss Honey getting carried away at the end of the number and Bruce's reaction to being sent to the Chokey was superb. Once more the ensemble as a whole excelled in this number.

One difficulty with the junior version is the desire to add an interval into this 1 Act show. Ending with 'that's not right' from Matilda was a little understated when tied to the constraints of licensed material. Could an addition SFX have been used to enhance the suspense perhaps? On the whole this was an impressive first half of the production.

ACT 2

The climax to the escapologist story, as the opening of Act 2, was imaginatively staged, once again with beautiful costumes. The red lighting enhanced the suspense and the fall into the splits by the acrobat was excellent. Mrs Phelps reaction to the story was particularly strong in this scene, and her admiration of Matilda's story telling abilities clear to see.

WHEN I GROW UP was beautifully sung and staged. Each soloist sang with sincerity, and as the number of performers doubled the sound rippled across the auditorium. The staging was charming in its simplicity with teddy's, scooter's, puppets, hoops and swords adding to the lyric of the song, and reminding us that children need to be children. I particularly enjoyed the use of childhood objects that allowed for movement across the stage such as the roller skating and hobby horse. Once again the ensemble produced an exceptional united sound. The ensemble drifting off to sleep was again visually effective direction whilst allowing for another nod to children's routines. Miss Honey and Matilda's Naughty/When I grow up sections were well sung and sensitively portrayed.

The final escapology section at the library where the father said his goodbyes was simplistic and rather moving. The dialogue was well timed to the music and the stillness of the scene was a nice contrast to the busier scenes either side of it.

The lead into THE SMELL OF REBELLION was strong, with Miss Trunchbull forcing push ups and poking the 'disgusting, revolting,' children. The various exercises utilised during the choreography were drilled to perfection, further accentuated by the fantastic facial expressions of the school children. Once again, the talents of the individuals were utilised and highlighted effectively. Turnbull kept a commanding presence throughout and I particularly enjoyed the final vocal growl on 'away', as well as the students collapse. QUIET was sung beautifully - vocally secure and sincere acting. The supporting action from Miss Trunchbull and the students until the 'quiet' freeze frame was particularly effective and was enhanced with the increased brightness of the lighting. The trick with the jug tipping was well conceived, although perhaps the newt itself could have been on fishing wire also to avoid it staying visible on the floor whilst torturing Miss Trunchbull. Trunchbull's reaction however, was superb, the build on the repetitive phrase, 'I've got a newt in my knickers,' was most amusing. Miss Honey telling Matilda her childhood story allowed for an emotional connection to form between these two performers.

Back to Miss Honey's classroom where the children finally took charge with their rebellious spelling test. Miss Trunchbull towering above the students on the box in a pink glow of light, as well as the chairs in a V formation gave a striking image. The reactions of the students at the wrong spellings whilst enthusiastically joining in was

very strong. The writing on the blackboard was effective, as was Trunchbull's reaction as the students chants increased. REVOLTING CHILDREN was another stand out moment of the production, with fabulous vocals by Mrs Wormwood (covering for Lavender who unfortunately lost her voice), ensemble vocals were once again tight with excellent diction. The split jumps and whirling of jumpers were fun and although due to the chairs the choreography was more simplistic here, the energy of the cast was infectious and filled the space.

The final scenes were acted well, with good cameo performances by Sergei with notable attempt of the Russian accent. I also enjoyed the stealth like movements of Mr and Mrs Wormwood on entry. Michael popping up from behind the suitcase was comical and the final moment between Miss Honey and Matilda was simply charming.

I would stop there but I must note the full out performances across the Bows with the characters various individualistic poses, and reprise of REVOLTING, with some power house vocals by Mrs Wormwood. It was a joy to see her 'not so inner' Diva come to play with strong vocal choices and a sensational performance

You should all be extremely proud of this production. Congratulations.

DESIGN

The design across the production was excellent. The letters, with their bright colours, and range of typefaces was a visual treat, beautifully setting the aesthetic as well as framing the show. The blackboard, wooden chairs, library, and TV allowed for each location to be set easily and seamlessly. The props were well designed to allow for the tricks work, whilst also adding to the musical staging, in particular the alphabet sheets during SCHOOL SONG, and the vast childhood props during WHEN I GROW UP. The scene changes were efficiently done and having stagehands in uniform added to the fluidity. The costumes, hair and makeup were all excellent, especially for the characterful Miss Trunchbull. The dazzling costumes for the escapologist and acrobat were beautiful and I genuinely found myself looking forward to the next story instalment just to see the costumes.

The lighting enhanced the set and action without being intrusive, and was particularly effective during the escapology scenes and for distinguishing the fear that Miss Trunchbull created. The cast did well with the backing tracks and they, along with the mic's, were cued well.

CAST

MATILDA – Dulcie Smithson

You portrayed Matilda with sensitivity and a flair of determination. Your story telling during the library scenes was engaging, and the relationships you formed with Miss Honey and Miss Phelps showed sincerity within your performance. You sang QUIET and NAUGHTY beautifully with a clear pure tone and attention to characterisation and facial expression. A confident portrayal. Great work.

MISS AGATHA TRUNCHBULL – Scarlett Gilbert

A fabulous performance. You fully committed to this role, vocally and physically, expertly assisted by some fabulous costumes. You were menacing, commanding, at times terrifying and managed to portray the comedic elements of the character to your audience, especially during the newt scene. A courageous performance, utilizing your characterful voice culminating in an outstanding performance. Well done.

MISS JENNIFER HONEY – Alex Hook

You played the role with sincerity. Although the character is fairly controlled and therefore has a more understated range (as written), the moments where Miss Honey could come out of her shell, such as the end of BRUCE were memorable. LITTLE GIRL was sung well and the connection you formed with Matilda was lovely. Good Work.

MR WORMWOOD – Luke Elliot & MRS WORMWOOD – Daisy Bullock

You worked well as a partnership against Matilda, clearly showing your disdain and lack of appreciation or understanding for her. Both performed with confidence and I particularly enjoyed the scene with the flamboyant Rudolpho. A special mention to Daisy who stepped in to REVOLTING CHILDREN and gave a truly memorable vocal performance. A note for Luke, moving forward take care with diction when using an accent. Nevertheless both of you proved to be strong character actors. Enjoyable, energetic portrayals. Excellent work.

FEATURED & ENSEMBLE –

The whole company was full of energy and you could sense that this was a production that you were all proud to be a part of. Vocally you made a strong collective sound, whilst the featured soloists excelled also. Some of the most memorable moments came from the ensemble as a whole, in particular the chocolate cake scene, spelling scene and the choreography throughout. Collectively the facial expressions and reactions were on point and enhanced the show as a whole. You danced with precision - this was a well-rehearsed ensemble of performers who had obviously worked hard to ensure a unified performance. The featured roles were all well cast, with a special mention to Mrs Phelps (Romily Maunder), Rudolpho (Ben Partridge), The Escapologist performers (Josh Barnes &

Kitty Stuart-Hunt), Bruce (Rory Hockett), Amanda (Polly Naughton), Nigel/Sergei (Bob Steggle), Lavender (Heidi March-Smith) and Michael (Paddy Parmiter) in fact I could mention you all. Congratulations on a first-class production.

Thank you for your warm welcome and your hospitality on the day and I look forward to many more performances.