



Matilda takes to the stage. *Revolving Children*, featuring the Broadway cast.



# Matilda Magic

Dark and fantastic, Roald Dahl's imagination has leapt from children's book to screen and stage twice now, with *Matilda* following in the steps of *Willy Wonka*.

**MATILDA WAS FIRST** published as a novel in 1988 and eight years later made into a film starring Mara Wilson. This magical story centres on an intelligent six-year-old girl who loves reading but endures a rather rotten family and cruel school principal. However, with the support of a friendly teacher and her classmates, Matilda creates her own happiness. Unlike many stories, this tale doesn't rely on moral kickback or karma to bring about a happy ending but, rather, the unleashing of Matilda's telekinetic powers.

The plot, characters, and books magically flying across the stage make *Matilda* a musical theatre dream-come-true for a creative production team. The partnership includes director Matthew Warchus, who brought us *Pride*, set designer Rob Howell, and choreographer Peter Darling. Add to this the off-beat Tim Minchin as composer and lyricist, and everything falls into place.

Australian, Minchin cut his teeth on the Melbourne comedy circuit with his wild hair, ill-

applied eye make-up and hilarious, politically incisive songs. He made it big in the UK when his *Darkside* show was a hit at the Edinburgh Comedy Festival in 2005. The remarkable documentary *Rock And Roll Nerd* captures the highs and lows of that tour.

Minchin originally worked on a local Australian musical version of *Matilda* in 2000, and wrote to Dahl for approval. A decade later his vision has been realised.

While four young actresses rotate in the lead role, in London Robert "Bertie" Carvel earned high praise playing Miss Trunchbull, and

Lauren Ward as Miss Honey. In fact, both have reprised their roles for the Broadway production. Their roles have since been taken over by Craig Bierko and Jill Paice, while David Leonard is now playing Miss Trunchbull in the UK production.

Matthew Warchus is directing the upcoming Australian production and the cast includes Elise McCann (who toured her one-woman show *Everybody Loves Lucy*) as Miss Honey, while Marika Aubrey (*The Last Five Years*) and the dashing Daniel Frederiksen (*Bastard Boys*) are set to play the Wormwoods. All eyes will also

be on James Millar who, after winning the Green Room Award for his performance of Jud Fry in *Oklahoma!*, will take on something completely different in the role of Miss Trunchbull. There's more than a modicum of camp in having Miss Trunchbull played by a man in the pantomime tradition.

A simple yet electrifying set comprises alphabet blocks, towering bookshelves, trampolines, lasers and confetti cannons. The music has that familiar Tim Minchin upbeat characteristic, and the children's performance of *Revolving Children* gives Irene Cara's *Fame* a run for its money.

To date, *Matilda* has won 50 international awards and the show's high praise is almost unanimous among critics. *The New York Post* said, "Once in a blue moon, a show comes out blazing and restores your faith in Broadway. *Matilda The Musical* is that show." Compliments such as inventive, poignant, "a white knight" and "edge-of-your-seat stupendous fun" suggests Australia is in for a treat when the full *Matilda* experience opens next month.

*Matilda The Musical* is currently playing at London's Cambridge Theatre, Broadway's Shubert Theatre and at Sydney's Lyric Theatre from July.

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Composer, Tim Minchin.