

# British Theatre Guide

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## Blowin' in the Wind

Written and devised by the company

Chickenshed

The Rayne Theatre, Chickenshed

14 March–2 April 2017

In 1955 the black woman Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white man. She later explained "People... say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but...I was not tired physically... No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

It was a small act that inspired a new phase in the American Civil Rights Movement.

The character of Rosa Parks (Jojo Morrall) and the civil rights struggle is a thread running through Chickenshed's exciting and often very moving musical account of various social protests.

Dylan's song "Blowin' in the Wind" also links the different sections of the show being given a soulful delivery by Cara McNanny at the start of the show and later two other fine interpretations by Iain Whitmore and Keisha Henderson.

William Fricker's imaginative set consists of a large performance space with a staircase to one side leading to the inside of a 1950s Montgomery bus slanting slightly some twelve feet or so above the stage. At times it is covered by a white screen on which we see some of the iconic images of the events being depicted. At other moments it is the place where Rosa sits reflecting on the historical events depicted below.

The performance space needs to be large to accommodate a cast of over two hundred. In a series of dance, tableau and dramatised action, brilliantly choreographed by creative leads overseen by director of dance Christine Neiring, they conjure up scenes of extraordinary visual and political power.

The show consists of seven sections, each dedicated to a specific social struggle. They are the 1963 killing of the black maid Hattie Carroll, the Standing Rock pipeline protest, children forced to be soldiers, the 1984 Miners' Strike, the Berlin Wall, the disappeared in Argentina and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Original documentary testimony and pictures accompany the stories. There is also a live band, rap artists and the recorded voice of Dylan singing.

There are too many memorable scenes to record here, but I was struck by the consistently fluent sensitivity of the dancers' movements as they create a visual representation of each story.

The show's depiction of the Standing Rock objections to the oil pipeline threatening their water supply took us back through a history of atrocities against Native Americans. As it does so, what look like bodies wrapped in blankets are passed to the dancers on stage. At the end of the piece, they open them up to reveal parts of the American flag.

Although the production works mostly on a grand scale, there are also impressive smaller scale moments. One occurs at the end of the Miners' section when a group of children playfully dance with a placard.

The show doesn't skirt controversy, exploring for instance why Native Americans might have a very negative view of Thanksgiving Day, why some miners might have a negative view of the strike and how those fighting for black rights might feel driven like the Black Panthers to more militant action.

It is often surprising how topical the stories are. Anyone seeing the suffering depicted in its account of the Berlin Wall will have more arguments against Trump's proposed wall on the borders of Mexico.

The final section is Black Lives Matter and a young woman steps forward in a quiet moment to tell us that two hundred and fifty-eight black males have been shot dead by police in 2016.

But the show ends in a mood of hope as the cast echo the early civil rights movement by marching as they sing "We shall Overcome".

This is the kind of show you might wish all your friends had seen. It is an entertaining and exhilarating performance.

**Reviewer:** [Keith Mckenna](#)