

British Theatre Guide

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Dick Whittington Goes Bollywood

By Harvey Viridi with lyrics by Farrukh Dhondy

Tara Arts

Tara Arts Theatre

5 December 2012–5 January 2013

Goes Bollywood, not goes *to* Bollywood please note. Our Dick, or Dikra to give him his proper name, comes to London to find fame and fortune just as in the well-known story. He teams up with a cat, falls in love with Alice, saves a foreign country from a plague of rats and ends up three times Lord Mayor of London.

Following Principal Boy tradition, Dikra is played by Krupa Pattani and there's a Dame too, huge-hipped (I'm being polite) cook Makhani Kaun (Anthony Bunsee) and a Fairy Godmother (Caroline Kilpatrick) with four arms as well as wings like some Indian deity. The same but different, as is the plot which isn't what you might see at Hackney Empire or elsewhere this season.

This Dikra is a Bradford Gujarati. His parents run a typical corner shop but he's a chef with dreams of his own restaurant. He is going to introduce Gujarati cuisine to the Punjabi cooking dominated capital. He's helped by clever cat Billi (Deven Modha), a Gujarati puss (though he thinks himself more as a karate-chopping tiger) who's been chucked out of 10 Downing Street after clearing the place of rats.

Noticeably missing is King Rat as baddie. Instead we have a very contemporary figure to hiss and boo. It is Alice's father, financier Sir Rattan Singh Chuua (Sam Kordbacher), who rules the rat run. With his off-shore investments, dodgy dealing and London's rats to do his bidding he thinks he is going to be the next Mayor of London. He already has the red frock coat and with so posh an accent, Union Jack shirt and one leg sporting a cricket pad he couldn't become more English. Boris watch out! That jaunty flat cap crowned with a big rat should be a warning.

There may be a cast of only six but an Arab prince, complete with kestrel, whose realm our Billi makes rat-free and even a chorus of singing, dancing rats appear from somewhere. You don't need elaborate sets and huge budgets to make magic. With the actors' energy and Claudia Mayer's colourful costumes, Jatinder Verma's production explodes into the intimacy of Tara's studio theatre—and with an audience on three sides, some of the traditional pantomime exchanges can be very interactive. It is all enormous fun.

It's a family show, devoid of blue jokes, with a splendid dame and an engaging cat, who make a match. There is a charming pair of young lovers and a baddie you can't help liking who ends up with the four-armed fairy. Everyone goes home happy—especially the audience.

That's not surprising when you have Sohini Alam and Hassan Mohyeddin's music to add to the enjoyment. It is under the direction of keyboard-playing Danyal Dhondy, with Camilo Tirado on percussion and Sohini Alam voicing all the songs to which the actor's mime, Bollywood fashion. There's also Shreya Kumar's Bollywood-tinged choreography to lift the spirits.

Tara has done it again. It is already selling out fast, so don't put off booking.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)