

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

The Full Monty

Book by Terrence McNally; Music and Lyrics by David Yazbek
Theatre Royal, Newcastle, and touring
(2004)

A British film, set in a northern town, transformed into a Broadway play, set in Buffalo, which originated in California, now performed by a British cast. A recipe, I was sure, for disaster, and I went along to the Theatre Royal expecting nothing very much.

I was wrong. But then, this is not your average modern Broadway musical. You don't come out humming any of the tunes (nor the scenery) but you do feel that you have experienced a really good piece of theatre. It retains - as far as a musical can - the "grittiness" of the original, but with Terrence McNally writing the book this is hardly surprising. The music of David Yazbek was a revelation to me: here are songs which reflect the characters and their situations, with an earthiness and, yes, grittiness which is more often found today in off-Broadway or fringe theatre than on the Great White Way or in the West End.

This is true musical theatre, something which I thought that here in the UK we had lost in the welter of back-catalogue pop musicals and stage versions of other films, such as [Summer Holiday](#) or [Footloose](#), a musical theatre in which the music arises from the character and situation rather than being simply tuneful ditties to get the audience singing along or wallowing in nostalgia..

Characterisation is generally strong too: less so than in straight drama, obviously, but as strong as anything you'll normally get in a musical, and in that sense I was reminded of shows as diverse as *West Side Story*, *A Chorus Line*, and much of Sondheim, although I would certainly not put the show into the same category (or categories, to be more precise) as the first two.

There are very occasional lapses into sentimentality which jarred on me but I have to say I was probably one of the very few in the audience to feel that way: most loved those moments!

It almost goes without saying that the performances and staging were strong. High production values are the norm in the modern touring musical and this was no exception, and it was nice to see a nine-piece orchestra at a time when more and more touring shows are going over to digital sound. And it is even nicer to be able to report that there were no sound balance problems of the kind which have bedevilled a number of the touring musicals I have seen in recent years.

I am told on very good authority that the cast were very nervous. This two week run at the Royal is the first after leaving the show's "home" theatre, the Churchill in Bromley, and they were coming from a 500-seater to play in a theatre almost three times as big. They needn't have worried!

And yes, the show translates well from Sheffield to New York State.

Reviewer: [Peter Lathan](#)