

British Theatre Guide

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Hippity Hop

Tim Webb with rap lyrics by BREIS

Oily Cart

Arts Depot

11–31 December 2018

This is a lively show specially designed for the 2- to 5-year-olds that was first staged to great success in 2005 and is now given a new production directed by Patrick Lynch.

It is a very simple story of a runaway pram that separates a mother and her baby and a search for the mother to reunite them that is staged as a very interactive promenade with the young audience sitting on the floor when not moving (with seats around the space for those who need them).

The audience travel around Hippity Hop town calling on various shopkeepers to see if they have seen the missing mum and that provides the opportunity for a series of sensory experiences that have been a feature of much of the work of this company which specialises in creating theatre for the very young as well as shows for autistic youngsters and those differently abled.

On the way into the performance space, the audience get to meet the performers and everyone gets a colourful cap to wear as they go through to find a circle of boldly painted scenery that forms the townscape and a DJ desk producing sounds with a strong beat.

The story gets started in rap style with its rhymes and bouncing rhythms and plenty of repetition, especially when it features instructions on what to do as everyone sets off in search of the baby's mum. First, there is a call at the sound shop; everyone settles in front of it and a bell has to be rung to get him to the door (and give the actor time to disappear and re-emerge as the Sound Man). He demonstrates some of the sounds that he has on offer and captures the sound (the stranger the better) that some of the children make, playing them back as though released from his opening hand. Simple but magical. There is no sign of the baby's mother but the Sound Man gives the baby a present of a bicycle bell for the pram and a hooter.

Up on their feet again, the audience make a brief circuit to reach the fabric shop, where there are exotic fabrics to handle and problems with the tee shirt stock who don't seem to know what colour they are. With the Cloth Woman, the audience experience texture and colour. By now, the audience are getting very interactive: finding where the bell is, contributing comment and each having their own swatch of fabric. The shop presents the baby with a golden fabric cover for its pram.

Still looking for the mother, the next call is the scent shop where the Scent Woman with her flowered headdress and collar of flowers and fruit can offer perfumed petals that puff up through chimneys and scented sprays. It's all about smells and smelling; the children get to meet the Sniffer Dog who is a bit poorly, so they gather petals to help him get better. The baby gets a garland of sweet-scented flowers but its mother is still missing so the search continues.

The fourth shop is that of the Light Man. He has some new lights to show off but there is a problem: they fuse and put all the lights out right across town. Can the audience help him?

This simple tale does have a happy ending, mother is united with baby, but it is the way that the story is told, the experience it offers that makes this such an enjoyable occasion to participate in. It is obvious from their involved reactions that these youngsters love it. Performers Oli 'Solocypher' Polidore Perrins and Katherine Vernez Gray have a wonderful ease and rapport with their audience and reinvent themselves as new characters in moments. The rap and the hip-hop music, supplemented by Kadialy Kouyate live among them on the West African kora, are continually engaging.

As writer Tim Webb and Max Reinhardt and Claire de Loon his fellow co-founders of Oily Cart hand over their company to a new team, this continues the beautiful child-sensitive work of this remarkable company.

Hippity Hop will tour in the New Year to The Burton Taylor Studio, Oxford (12-13 January), Attenborough Arts Centre, Leicester (15-16 January), Gulbenkian, Canterbury (23-27 January), Theatr Clwyd, Mold (29 January – 2 February), Stratford Circus Arts Centre, London (8-9 February) and Southbank Centre, London (13-17 February).

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)