

British Theatre Guide

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I Dreamed A Dream

Palace Theatre, Manchester

19–23 June 2012

The show's title—shared with the song that helped create the fragile phenomenon of Susan Boyle—comes loaded with irony of course.

All her dreams, and to an extent those of millions of others, came true when she achieved fame just three years ago, on TV's *Britain's Got Talent*. But when everyone involved woke up to the idea that here was a woman ill-equipped to cope with overnight stardom, then the fairytale took on a darker narrative.

The Susan Boyle starved of oxygen at birth—leaving her “shy and awkward”—suddenly found herself breathing in a rarefied atmosphere, inside a worldwide publicity bubble.

So here is a re-creation of the ‘journey’ (without which no self-respecting modern celebrity can travel); the kind of life story of a star usually only seen on stage long after their light went out.

Scottish actress Elaine C Smith both co-wrote the show and stars as its heroine, and you have to admire a big and brave performance. In particular she proves that her own singing voice would get her through several stages of a talent hunt.

In fairness though the script still feels like a first draft, weighed down with clichés or jokes that telegraph their arrival.

Turning the diffident Boyle into bold narrator of her own story is an obvious contradiction that tends to undercut its drama, and the music in the first act simply serves as a timeline to her early years.

The second act is an altogether different affair, taking a suitably surreal approach to the moment stardom beckoned and bringing in larger-than-life characters like a tabloid attack-dog Gavin (boo, hiss) and much more affable manager Andy (hooray!)

So by the time the mezzo-soprano herself comes on stage (and that can't always be guaranteed) the audience are so well-informed that a standing ovation is the least they can offer.

Given all that's just gone before though, you can't avoid the feeling that it's those of us who make up that audience who are making too many demands on such an uncertain celebrity.

Share the dream before Saturday.

Reviewer: [David Upton](#)