

British Theatre Guide

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Idiots Assemble: Spitting Image Saves the World

Al Murray, Matt Forde and Sean Foley

Avalon and Birmingham Rep

Birmingham Rep

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The return in 2020 of *Spitting Image* which lambasted establishment figures—often in a cruel way—signified there was still a yearning for the satirical puppet show.

Although Peter Fluck and Roger Law's creation lasted for only two series on BritBox, the digital video subscription service founded by BBC Studios and ITV, there was disappointment from some people that *Spitting Image* had come to an end.

That has been remedied with a stage show, *Idiots Assemble: Spitting Image Saves the World* which is having its world première at Birmingham Rep. Parts of it are funny, anarchic and acerbic—but there are also scenes and songs in the second half that do not hit the heights achieved before the interval.

The show features all the characters you would expect to see including Boris Johnson, Sir Keir Starmer, Vladimir Putin and members of the Royal Family. New puppets include Suella Braverman, Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Nigel Farage. Perhaps there are just too many characters in the show.

One of the reasons why the original television series in the mid-1980s was a success was that it was bang up-to-date, lampooning characters and events that were at the forefront of people's minds. *Idiots Assemble* takes a similar stance.

There are regular appearances during the show by Nicola Sturgeon who had just announced her resignation as Scotland's First Minister. She is portrayed as an enraged, foul-mouthed, English-hating politician.

According to Sean Foley, the Rep's artistic director who is one of the writers of *Idiots Assemble* and also the director, two new songs appeared during the previews and political change the day before press night led to parts of the script being rewritten.

Before the start, there is a PA announcement warning the audience to leave if they are easily offended and not laughing will infringe the producers' human rights!

Idiots Assemble starts with Sir Ian McKellen hosting a show in which the Royal Family, especially King Charles, complain about how the country is not what it used to be. A very small puppet of Tom Cruise is given a mission impossible: to repair the fabric of society.

Some of the touches involving the Royal Family are excellent. The late Queen plays along on guitar to "We Will Rule You", Charles sings "Bohemian Rhapsody" with altered lyrics including "I'm just a posh boy, nobody loves me" and Harry never misses an opportunity to promote his book *Spare*.

Other highlights of the show include Ant and Dec hosting a talent show, *Britain Needs Saving*, in which celebrities audition for a spot on Cruise's team, Rishi Sunak is portrayed as a school head boy in short trousers, Liz Truss makes a brief appearance as a lettuce and there is a confrontation between Angela Rayner and Jess Phillips which ends with the Shadow Chancellor headbutting the MP. I wonder how the real member for Yardley who was sitting in the audience reacted to that.

On the downside, the Princess of Wales, Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp and Alison Hammond who hosts an episode of *Bargain Hunt* do not look the part.

Overall, though, the show is slick. There are times when you forget that there are actually people controlling the puppets who almost perfectly move in time with the voiceover artists' recordings. The 12 puppeteers rightly received a standing ovation on press night.

So is *Idiots Assemble: Spitting Image Saves the World* a success? In the words of Sir Keir Starmer, "A simple yes or no answer will suffice." Okay, then—yes.

Reviewer: [Steve Orme](#)