

British Theatre Guide

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The Little Match Girl

The Tiger Lillies
Bath Theatre Royal
(2009)

For some members of the audience, clearly, this was their first meeting with the weird and wonderful trio that is The Tiger Lillies. The sound of seats swinging back upright as their occupiers departed bore testament to that.

And in truth, one could blame anyone unfamiliar with the Lillies for being taken aback. Clearly, when they booked for a musical take on a Hans Christian Anderson story, they weren't expecting 70 minutes of relentlessly bleak lyrics sung in a falsetto and frankly rum stage business straight out of *Eraserhead*.

Others, the vast majority, had fallen under the spell of the group which first shot to fame following the runaway success of the sublime *Shockheaded Peter* for which they provided the music. The production, which premiered nearly a decade ago, went on to enjoy two runs in London and a world tour.

Match Girl is a darker piece than its predecessor, the comedy arising more from the unrelenting nature of the grimness. In essence, the story relates how a poor little girl who sells matches on the streets for a living, dies on a bleak, cold evening out in the pitiless streets because if she returns home without having sold any matches, her drunk of a grandfather will beat her savagely.

For those unfamiliar with the band's *oeuvre*, the group's music is a cross between music hall, Brecht and Weill and Tom Waits, to name but a few ingredients, played by a drummer (Adrian Huger); bass-player (Adrian Stout) and accordionist/ singer (Martin Jacques) who dress in top hats and Victorian frock coats. For this production they are augmented by a cello and two violins.

In addition, under the direction of Dan Jemmett, Laetitia Angot plays the little match girl and Bob Goody plays the man, although it's not so much acting as highly-stylised mime which takes place both on the stage proper and inside a series of proscenium arches whose curtains are drawn open to reveal progressively smaller stages like a Russian doll set. The designer is Dick Bird.

At times the music is disarmingly sweet ('You've Lost Your Love'); at others, a mad polka, sample lyrics include: "Why does she suffer, dear God?" and "she is like Jesus on a cross". As Oscar Wilde said of the death of Little Nell - 'you would have to have a heart of stone not to laugh'. Heartily recommended.

Reviewer: [Pete Wood](#)