

British Theatre Guide

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The Animals and Children Took To The Streets

1927

The Dukes, Lancaster

7–9 November 2013

What Lancaster witnessed here, Malta, China and France also get to see in the next few weeks.

Then again, after a world première in Australia, three critically-acclaimed London seasons, and two years of touring across the globe, this hit show has already earned its credentials worldwide.

It's by the 1927 theatre company and uses digital projection techniques, live performance and music to tell a cautionary tale set in a world where children are out of control.

Three white-faced performers appear either side of three white screens onto which a series of increasingly bizarre animations is projected.

They appear inside the screens as characters caught up in the tale, or outside them with smaller screens onto which the films create clever added effects.

You might reasonably expect it all to add a thrilling third dimension to theatrecraft, but instead it presents a rather flattened style of narrative, much closer to the cinema technique on which it relies—even to Victorian shadow lantern displays—rather than the traditional depth of a stage.

You cannot help but admire animator Paul Barritt's use of carefully-synchronised film projection or, accordingly, the cast's pinpoint timing in hitting their marks.

Likewise you have to congratulate the Dukes for grabbing one of the few current performances of this show in the UK.

But, as several other recent theatrical attempts at this technique have demonstrated, there really is no substitute for coherent story telling, the absence of which was all too evident here.

Time and again you found yourself wondering how much more effective all this craft could be when applied to much more familiar legends, like fairy tales for instance.

A dodgy sound system at this particular performance did not help, particularly when its actor-musicians adopt a range of grotesque voices to denote different characters—always a difficulty where white faces are used.

The primitive filmed illustrations become a little wearing and are a further distraction to the plot.

This was all digital shadow and no substance.

Reviewer: [David Upton](#)