

British Theatre Guide

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The Mischief Before Christmas

State of Play Theatre

State of Play Theatre and York Theatre Royal

York Theatre Royal

3–24 December 2016

Over the last few years, State of Play Theatre—formerly known as TongueTied Theatre—has gained a reputation for producing enchanting children's shows such as *The Revenge of Mr Trout!*, *Cinderella* and *Puss in Boots*. To celebrate the festive season, the company has devised a charming new show aimed at kids aged between 3 and 7.

The Mischief Before Christmas kicks off in the foyer of the newly refurbished York Theatre Royal where the audience is greeted by two Christmas spirits—Twinkle (Lane Paul Stewart) and Jingle (Danielle Winter)—who spend their time looking for places to tell their stories. During their travels they use a magical device (a “spirit level”) to ensure optimum levels of Christmas cheer.

Over the course of 45 minutes, Twinkle and Jingle tell the tale of a young girl named Sophie who must search for Frank, a naughty elf who has not yet delivered the children's letters to Santa Claus. During the hunt, we are led around the theatre by the two performers, culminating in a tent filled with washing-lines of letters.

As *The Mischief Before Christmas* is a promenade piece, there is no traditional stage set. However, designer Ali McDowall has found other inventive ways of creating the world of the story. In the first part of the show, for example, the performers push around a trolley containing three suitcases, and from these cases they produce lovingly crafted miniature scenery.

The children in the audience were clearly enchanted by the show, and this is largely due to the energy and enthusiasm of the two performers who grab the youngsters' attention from the very beginning. Stewart and Winter encourage the kids to participate in the action by asking them questions about Christmas and getting them to sing along to “Jingle Bells”. However, this doesn't mean that the adults are let off the hook—they are expected to join in the fun too!

Although the York pantomime is a beloved institution, some younger children might appreciate a gentler and more intimate show. *The Mischief Before Christmas* is a fine way of introducing children to the magic of the theatre.

Reviewer: [James Ballands](#)