

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

Winchester

Elizabeth Braaten Palmieri
GreenHouse Theatre Project
Paradise in Augustines
12–17 August 2024



The Winchester Mystery House, as it has come to be known, is a gargantuan, sprawling mansion in San Jose, California. It was built, rebuilt and extended almost continually over a near 40-year period by its owner, the wealthy heiress and widow Sarah Winchester.

This new play by Elizabeth Braaten Palmieri, who also features in the cast, tells the slightly skewed and bizarre story about the very eccentric woman, her life and the herculean building project which would become forever synonymous with her after her death in 1922.

It's a slightly screwball performance that sits very easily within the tangled web of truth and mythology which has grown rampantly around the somewhat private woman and the seemingly ludicrous, never-ending construction of the house. Anna Sundberg plays Winchester, draped in mourning black, but often grinning impishly, despite the spooky, candlelit gloom of the stage while the other three players, Palmieri, Alex Hoge and Ian Sobule, fill out the cast of characters, swapping in and out as needed for the various people who come in and out of Winchester's life.

But it's a strange play. It's quirkily funny at times, and even dips into a full dance scene at one point replete with modern music, but also has moments of sombre sadness and reflection while telling the darker moments of Winchester's life and the tragedies she suffered.

It's certainly an entertaining spectacle, and the troupe are endearingly enthusiastic hosts. A play, much like the mansion, seems to have grown in all directions with a logic that only its creator can fully understand. Perhaps that is the point, and a strange spectacle is often the most memorable.

Reviewer: [Graeme Strachan](#)