

British Theatre Guide

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

The Woman in Black

Susan Hill, adapted by Stephen Mallatratt
King's Theatre, Edinburgh
(2010)

While a comedy has to be judged on its laughs a thriller has to be judged on its shivers. To my surprise this play is quite a nerve-raising experience.

The beauty of the piece is in its simplicity and perfect use of the theatre, just two actors and a gradual accumulation of effects as an old lawyer Arthur Kipps (Robert Demeger) enlists an actor (Peter Bramhill) to help him come to terms with a strange experience from his past.

The simplicity and the ability to still shock explain the longevity of this play by the late Stephen Mallatratt. It can be rather melodramatic but that could equally be due to the genre as its birth in the eighties.

Both Kipps and the actor display compelling transformations over the course of the performance as Kipps learns to portray the many people he encountered and the actor is drawn into the story playing the young Arthur Kipps.

And as the actor is drawn into the story so are the audience. The introduction of these two characters is rather slow, even eyelid-drooping, but once they get into the story proper all eyes are glued to the stage.

Demeger does awkward old Kipps well, but is more entertaining swapping between the many other roles, though it stays quite straight, no female characters. Bramhill has a seemingly less challenging role but is fundamental to creating the tension in this piece his the careful narration of the events.

Bramhill also gets more time on stage allowing to give some depth to the character of young Arthur Kipps, exactly the sort of heart-warming innocent needed at the centre of a dark tale.

Both performers switch precisely between characters and settings bringing alive the stage, but they are greatly aided by some very tuned-in techies. The technical side is tight and imaginative without upstaging the actors.

Set and props are kept to a minimum so the actors, the sound and the lighting do all the work; the suspense that builds up over the piece is down mainly to skilled timing from these three parts of the production.

Saving the eponymous effect for a little later and using it a little less might have made the production a little scarier, although it is the noises that tend to cause the most screams from the crowd.

However walking home through the misty streets of Edinburgh afterwards I can't deny this production continues to put the fear in theatre.

Until 20th February at King's and touring

Peter Lathan [reviewed](#) this production in Newcastle and and Steve Burbridge [saw](#) it in Darlington

Reviewer: [Seth Ewin](#)