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5 - 28 AUGUST 2016  
PRESS REVIEW

THE STORY OF MR B

SHAKE SHAKE THEATRE





# The Story of Mr B ●●●●●

A tiny tale, told with love in a giant pop-up book

**Source:** The List

**Date:** 12 August 2016

**Written by:** Thom Dibdin

Brave, tragic, compassionate and hilarious by turns, Shake Shake Theatre's *The Story of Mr B* lifts its audience into its heart and holds them there. With great humour and a real sense of how the minds of youngsters over about three-years-old work (while making sure any younger siblings won't be bored), it tells of life, love, forgiveness and regret.

Mr B is Mr Bumblegrum, a wonderfully dumpy puppet of an old man who lives alone, deep in the forest. Not even the mushrooms are his friends and he spurns the birds' beauty. His job is to count the trees, and that is what he does. But where did he come from? And how did the once- friendly waiter in the restaurant car of a local train arrive in this lonely place?

If grown-ups will admire the daring with which *The Story of Mr B* addresses the big issues in life – just as any great theatre should, whatever age it is aimed at – everyone will be fascinated by the intricate, cleverly constructed book through which the story is told.

Open it up and it becomes a forest where Bumblegrum's house pops-up, out of the page. Turn a page and a tiny train puffs over distant mountains then out onto the stage, big enough for young Mr B to climb aboard. Windows open to reveal his adventures told in crisp, precisely illuminated shadow puppets. Above, a giant parasol sun twirls in anticipation, singing to Mr B in a vain attempt to cheer him up.

It is the telling, though, which is so engaging. Puppeteers Jessica Nicholls and Pierre Filliez have a natural rapport which makes the theatre itself an easy place to be as their audience arrive – before they gently take them into their world and reveal the many splendid things which happen there.

# The Story of Mr B 4\*\*\*\*



## REVIEW OVERVIEW

★★★★

### Delightful childrens entertainment

one4review | On 13, Aug 2016

The Story of Mr B

This is an enchanting, beautifully crafted piece of theatre by people who understand children and know how to engage them completely in the world that has been created.

The story of Mr B is contained within a huge, velvet covered book in the middle of the stage. The book is opened and the pages within become the backdrop to the story. We begin by finding Mr B, a dumpy, grumpy old man, sitting all by himself in the middle of a forest counting trees. How did he come to be like this? To find out we go back to the start of the story where he's happy and friendly, working in the bar on a local train. One day he falls in love with one of the passengers, the beautiful singer Lucy, but after an all too brief romance she is killed in a thunderstorm by a falling tree. Mr B, sad and angry retreats from the world and, at the point we first saw him, is bitter, angry and alone. Things get worse for Mr B as the trees and the sun leave when they are shunned and he ends up in a barren winter land. At this point he realises that this is not what he wants and he starts to make things better – bringing back flowers and then trees and making friends with the sun. We all blow him a kiss and wish him well on his way.

The story, and the big issues it contains of love, tragedy and regret, is told with humour and charm by the skilled puppeteers who invest the puppets with real character and life. The book in which the story is set is a beautiful, exquisite. At one point it opens up and is transformed into an alpine scene where a tiny train comes over the top and then a full (puppet) size one, complete with a tin can engine and real smoke comes through the tunnel which has opened out from the page. At another point doors are open and we see a beautifully rendered shadow of the romance. The elements of the story telling are cleverly combined and the audience was utterly rapt for the whole 40 minutes.

Both children and the adults lucky enough to accompany them will be enchanted. Do try to see this.

By Karen

ShakeShake Theatre

Institut Francais daily 11.15 and 2.30

fest

## The Story of Mr B

*Eve Green, aged 7, found this puppet show about friendship and death sad, but loved it all the same*

FEATURE - PUBLISHED 14 AUGUST 2016



By **Eve Green**

### **What happens in the show?**

It's a puppet show. Mr Bumblegrum is very sad because his friend dies but he learns about friendship, love and death.

### **Describe the show in five words**

Amazing, funny, sad, good, lovely.

### **Who was your favourite character and why?**

My favourite characters were the trees and the sun because he was funny, happy and he sang.

### **Were there any characters you didn't like?**

No, they were all good.

### **What did you like most about the show?**

I really liked the way the story was told and the puppets.

### **What didn't you like about the show?**

Nothing!

**What did you think of the songs?**

The music was great.

**What did your grown-up think of the show?**

"It was a really well-produced show with lots of life lessons for kids, a beautifully portrayed story, and was very touching and uplifting."

**Would you tell your friends to come and see the show?**

Yes, definitely!

# THE STAGE

## Edinburgh Festival Fringe: our critics' best shows



by The Stage - Aug 17, 2016

At the mid-point of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, with more than 150 shows under its collective reviewing belt, we asked our critics to name just the two best shows they've seen at this year's event. Here's what they chose...

Thom Dibdin

The Story of Mr B – Institute Francaise D'Ecosse

Children's puppet theatre which addresses the big issues in life – just as any great theatre should, whatever age it is aimed at.

# Where children can glimpse a grown-up world's complexity

Artistic staging, puppets and tales of a child's protective fantasy world

**Fringe Children's Theatre**

**Chiffonnade**  
Institut Français  
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**The Story of Mr B**  
Institut Français  
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**Mikey and Addie**  
Summerhall  
\*\*\*\*  
Mary Brennan

**T**HE HURLY burly of the Fringe doesn't always feel like a welcoming habitat for very young children, nonetheless there are wee gems for early-years theatre-goers. **Chiffonnade** is one of them. Choreographed by Michele Dhallu and performed by Suzel Barbaroux for Carré Blanc Cie, it's like a living picture book for tinies (aged one and over). A gigantic squishy ball of many colours sits alone on the stage. It's actually the patchwork house of a mercurial sprite who gives the sphere lively legs, turns it into a snail-shell home, and finally wriggles out of it into the Big World. That's when the material magic begins: the ball harbours a rainbow whisk of differently textured fabrics which Barbaroux fashions into clever surprises – even a tropical beach is twisted into shape under her fingers. Uh oh! Why is the cloth getting wet? The final texture turns out to be water, with Barbaroux dancing and splashing like a free spirit. Even if the very young don't quite twig that it's an adventure in growing up, from safe cocoon to (merrily aqua-planing) adulthood, the captivating visuals are a joy for all ages.  
*Runs until August 28*

**MR B** – short for Bumblegrum – has no friends. Doesn't want any. Go away... But Shake Shake



**METAMORPHOSIS:** Chiffonnade with Suzel Barbaroux works equally well as an allegory of growing up, and a simple adventure in colour and texture for the younger among its audience.

Theatre's puppeteers, Jessica Nicholls and Pierre Filliez, know that his lonely story has a happy ending, one that audiences (aged 3+) should see for themselves. It's all inside a very big book, the pages not just colourfully illustrated but enriched with pop-up additions or little windows that reveal cameos of shadow-play. Time was, Mr B was young and in love with a singer. He met her in the restaurant car of a train. And there it is, tiny and distant at first but then – puffing smoke – arriving on-stage, big enough for them to climb on board. When a lightning flash fells a tree, fatally crushing

Mr B's sweetheart in full view of everyone, he becomes the snarly, solitary grouch we encounter at the start.

The loss of future happiness and the corrosive effects of profound grief work for adults, and many would shy away from these dark and doom-laden topics for little ones. But the unflinching joy of this production lies in seeing Mr B realise, from within his own heart, that he has to emerge from such futile misery. Whereupon the snow-shrouded book bursts into a springtime of sprouting flowers, leafy trees and sunny beams.

The miniaturised details are so

entrancing. I'm not sure if the kisses we blew at the end were for Mr B – or for the puppeteers.  
*Runs until August 28*

THERE IS a chance children in the audience will know a **Mikey** or an **Addie** – they may even be a Mikey or an Addie, and know firsthand what it feels like to be caught up in a bewilderment of truths, lies and choices that bring you to the cusp of adult decisions.

Ten-year-old Mikey insists his Dad is a spaceman with Nasa – why else wouldn't he be at home with Mikey and his Mum? Classmate Addie smells a rat, but

then she's a fact-finding, organising, bossy-boots – and she wants to start a school web-hunt for thrilling news about Mikey's orbiting dad.

Addie has no "people skills". Soon Mikey's world is falling apart, Addie's too. It's such a pile-up of lost trust, disappointment, confused emotions – Addie feels guilty for pushing Mikey into discovering where his father really is – that it surely can't be made a laughing matter? But writer Robert Alan Evans and performer Andy Manley share an instinct for the believably ridiculous and for the

way clever-clogs and imaginative dreamers can easily do daft things.

In this welcome re-staging of an earlier two-hander, Manley becomes the sole narrator and all the characters, from the earnest, tweedy keeper of the tale to the (impressively differentiated) Mikey and Addie.

As significant space-age silvery items on plinths become down-to-earth everyday objects, it's the value of friendship and self-knowledge that shines out for audiences thanks to Manley's gift for story-telling. Recommended for ages 9+.

*Runs until August 28*

## Fringe Children's Theatre reviews:

### The Story of Mr B.



By Mary Brennan, Dance critic

MR B – short for Bumblegrum – has no friends. Doesn't want any. Go away... But Shake Shake Theatre's puppeteers, Jessica Nicholls and Pierre Filliez, know that his lonely story has a happy ending, one that audiences (aged 3+) should see for themselves.

It's all inside a very big book, the pages not just colourfully illustrated but enriched with pop-up additions or little windows that reveal cameos of shadow-play. Time was, Mr B was young and in love with a singer. He met her in the restaurant car of a train. And there it is, tiny and distant at first but then - puffing smoke – arriving on-stage, big enough for them to climb on board. When a lightning flash fells a tree, fatally crushing Mr B's sweetheart in full view of everyone, he becomes the snarly, solitary grouch we encounter at the start. The loss of future happiness, the corrosive effects of profound grief – adults, and many works for little ones, would shy away from these dark and doom-laden topics.

But the unfailing joy of this production lies in seeing Mr B realise, from within his own heart, that he has to emerge from such futile misery. Whereupon the snow-shrouded book bursts into a spring-time of sprouting flowers, leafy trees and sunny beams. The miniaturised details are so entrancing, I'm not sure if the kisses we blew at the end were for Mr B – or for the puppeteers.



BroadwayBaby.com

# The Story of Mr B



by James Beagon on 19th August 2016

**ShakeShakeTheatre present the tale of a man named Bumblegrum in a quirky and enjoyable puppet show for children.**

“The Story of Mr B will brighten up any rainy Edinburgh afternoon.

The story explores the question of just why Mr Bumblegrum is so grumpy all of the time, delving into his surprisingly tragic past and then looking at the consequences of his subsequent decision to reject all forms of friendship. Although Mr Bumblegrum prompts a lot of laughs and giggles with his grumbly mumblings and amusing squishy movement, the show does touch on darker territory from time-to-time. In many ways, the best children's theatre often does and the show manages to prompt a few insightful conversations between parent and child about what's just happened. The two halves of the story aren't quite as seamless as they could be, with several aspects introduced in the first half seemingly forgotten about in the second, but it's still good fun.

The design is gorgeous. The storybook genuinely feels magical, with wonderfully painted backdrops and a pop-up element straight out of a dream. Flowers grow from the grass lining the front of the stage before your very eyes to maintain a sense of wonder. The puppets too are lots of fun, foregoing legs in favour of squishy bottoms which make for a very amusing movement style which is portrayed with perfect puppeteering and timing.

The two performers, Pierre Filliez and Jessica Nicholls, explore different styles of storytelling, putting a bit of shadow-puppetry into the regular puppetry mix, as well as full-blown costumed acting. The costumed acting by Filliez forms the narration section of the play, which has its up and downs. Although most of the meaning is evident, some of the English is a bit jumbled or mispronounced, which could prove a problem for children not yet entirely fluent in English themselves. Yet Filliez and Nicholls are entertaining till the last; in particular, Nicholls' wide range of amusing squeaky noises never gets old as far as the children's giggles can attest to.

The Sun himself attests in the show that "Sun will always follow rain" and this indeed proves to be the case as The Story of Mr B will brighten up any rainy Edinburgh afternoon. Highly recommended to parents with children aged four and above.

## **The Story of Mr B review at Institut Francais, Edinburgh – ‘endearing’**

By Nick Awde - Aug 23, 2016

Mr Bumblegrum is very grumpy, in fact he’s never happy, ever. And so, to help us understand why, two cheeky toadstools bounce on to the puppet stage to introduce The Story of Mr B. In this tale for children about finding happiness, Australian Jessica Nicholls and Swiss Pierre Filliez strike an enchanting balance between funny and sad, told through a huge book that opens up to become Mr B’s universe.

Peopled by expressive sandbag puppets, moving forests and fluttering butterflies, the pages open to reveal Mr B’s house, an alpine railway station, a winter forest or a little window through which we see a shadow play candlelit dinner. We see how Mr B fell in love, travelled, had adventures and how tragedy befell him. But being reminded of all the wonderful people he met and places he visited doesn’t make him feel any better, so all the animals and trees in the forest where he lives join together to show him how to be happy.

The innocently simple delivery addresses big themes boldly but sensitively, filtered through a fairytale narrative. The result is an endearingly thoughtful show from Shake Shake Theatre where both puppets and performers connect magically with the audience.

Endearing puppet show addresses big themes to connect magically with its audience.