



A PLAY GUIDE FROM THE DESK OF
ASHLIE CORCORAN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

MATILDA THE MUSICAL

Book by Dennis Kelly
Music and lyrics by Tim Minchin
From the novel by Roald Dahl

MAY 16–JULY 14, 2019
STANLEY INDUSTRIAL ALLIANCE STAGE



Notes from Ashlie Corcoran

I am so thrilled to be sharing our production of *Matilda the Musical*—the award-winning show—with all of you. Based on the beloved novel by Roald Dahl, this musical tells the story of an extraordinary girl who, armed with a vivid imagination and a sharp mind, dares to take a stand and change her own destiny. Matilda is a precocious little girl with the gift of telekinesis who overcomes obstacles caused by her family and school and helps her teacher to reclaim her life.

I loved *Matilda* when I read the novel and I was utterly charmed when I saw the film. But the musical then exceeded all of my expectations! It is a fun, cheeky, and imaginative blockbuster, full of fantastic tunes and great characters. I am excited to program large musicals that every family member can enjoy—and this is a great example. This musical is creative and playful, and appeals to children of all ages, while incorporating sophisticated wit for adults. Additionally, Roald Dahl's work has a gleefully subversive edge that's accessible to all ages.

This production of *Matilda* is a co-production with the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg and

the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton. Our creative team is comprised of Winnipeggers, Edmontonians, and Vancouverites. A third of the adult cast comes from each city, while the youth in this production are all from Vancouver (as the youth were from Edmonton at the Citadel performances and from Winnipeg in the RMTC performances)! It is wonderful to be able to provide work in other cities for local Vancouver actors and to see them showcase their talents across Canada.

Co-productions, if approached judiciously, can harness the financial requirements of large-scale pieces. However, the partnerships that attract the Arts Club are ones that go beyond financial benefit. We are interested in creative partnerships where artistic work and investment have a larger reach, where community engagement is greater, and where opportunities for artists are increased (such as lengthened contracts). These kinds of creative partnerships expose our staff members to new collaborative styles, and share different artistic approaches with our audiences. Through this process, we believe that our art has greater reach and that our skills as artists and administrators are honed.

Thank you so much for attending *Matilda the Musical*! I hope you enjoy it.

Ashlie

Ashlie Corcoran;
photo by Mark Halliday



Roald Dahl's

MATILDA

THE MUSICAL



Synopsis

(spoiler alert!)

Act I

The show opens with a chorus of children expressing how much their parents love them. All the while, Mrs. Wormwood discovers she is nine months pregnant (to her surprise) and can therefore not attend her Ballroom

dance competition. She is upset; she doesn't want the baby as she already has a son. Fast forward to the delivery room. Matilda is born and Mr. Wormwood, her father, wishes she was a boy as he is unwilling to accept he has a daughter.

Five years later, we meet Matilda Wormwood, an avid reader with an unhappy home life. Her father (a crooked car salesman) tells the family of his plans to get rich by scamming Russian businessmen into buying used cars made-to-look new. Matilda stands up to her father, saying his plan isn't fair, but he retaliates by blaming

her for their family's troubles. Having been sent to her room, Matilda, unhappy with her family's treatment of her, sings about how "life isn't fair, but if you don't like it and you want to change it, don't let being little stop you, change it."

The next morning, Matilda visits the library, a place of comfort for her. While there, she begins to tell Mrs. Phelps, the librarian, a story she created about two great circus performers; an Acrobat and an Escapologist. The performers long to have a child, and as they grow old their work becomes the only escape from their longing. To try and evade the sadness, they set out to attempt the most dangerous act ever attempted.

The next day is Matilda's first day of school. A chorus of older students warn the new students about the scary headmistress. Inside her classroom, Matilda's teacher, Miss Honey, asks the class if they know their two-times-tables. Matilda does, and she can even complete complex questions in her head. Miss Honey is amazed. When they move on to reading, Miss Honey discovers five-year-old Matilda can also read full-length novels. As the bell rings, Miss Honey goes to recommend that Matilda be moved up with the older children, however, the nasty and child-hating headmistress, Miss Agatha Trunchbull, refuses. Miss Honey then vows to help Matilda learn, whether Miss Trunchbull likes it or not.

Outside, Matilda is playing with her new friend Lavender when a classmate approaches them worried. He tells them that Miss Trunchbull is after him. The older students explain that Nigel will be put in the chokey, a cupboard in Miss Trunchbull's office that is lined with nails and broken glass. The children try to hide Nigel under a pile of coats. When Miss Trunchbull angrily approaches, Matilda fibs and says that Nigel has been

under the coats for an hour because he suffers from narcolepsy. Furious that Matilda has out-smarted her, Miss Trunchbull turns her anger onto a small girl named Amanda; she swings her around by her pigtails and throws her off into the distance.

Back at Matilda's house after school, Miss Honey arrives to talk to the Wormwood's about Matilda's advanced abilities, but Mrs. Wormwood is uninterested as she is in the middle of her dance lesson. She explains to Miss Honey that Matilda shouldn't be reading and should only think about her looks. Miss Honey feels defeated and wishes Matilda knew how special she is.

At the library once again, Matilda continues her story to Mrs. Phelps: The dangerous act was arranged by the Acrobat's evil sister. When the Escapologist steps on stage, he declares that the stunt has been cancelled because his wife, the Acrobat, is finally pregnant. The audience roars in appreciation. Everyone forgets about the cancelled stunt, except for the sister who produces a signed contract stating the stunt must be performed, or they must go to jail.

The next day at school, Miss Trunchbull storms into the classroom blaming Matilda for stealing a piece of her chocolate cake. Bruce, one of Matilda's classmates, admits he ate the cake. Miss Trunchbull then produces a massive chocolate cake and instructs Bruce to eat the entire cake as a punishment. He can hardly finish, but with his classmates' encouragement, he completes the challenge. But his punishment isn't over; Miss Trunchbull then drags him off to the chokey.

Act II

The second act begins in the library where Matilda continues with the rest of her story: The Acrobat and the Escapologist perform their stunt for the audience. It starts well, but something goes wrong and the Acrobat falls. She manages to live long enough to deliver the child, but the effort is too much, and she dies. Then things get worse. The Escapologist doesn't blame the evil sister but instead invites her to move into the house and help raise his daughter. The evil sister was cruel to the child in secret and her father never knew.

Back at the Wormwood's house, Mr. Wormwood explains to the family that he discovered how to fraudulently reduce the mileage on used cars and that his scheme to sell the cars worked. Matilda gets angry with her father for lying, and in retaliation he threatens to ban her from the library and never let her read again. In her room, Matilda tells the rest of her story to herself: The Escapologist's daughter cried herself to sleep, alone. She never said anything about her evil aunt, and the cruelties only got worse until one day she was locked in a cellar. Fortunately, that day her father came home early and when he heard his daughter crying in the cellar, he smashed open the door and grew very angry at the evil sister after learning of her cruelty. Unfortunately, that was the last time the girl ever saw her father.

At school, Lavender brings Miss Trunchbull a glass of water, but decides to play a prank by putting a newt inside the glass. Miss Trunchbull drinks, and then screams when she notices the newt. Instead of blaming Lavender she blames Eric, another classmate, and she starts pulling on his ears; stretching them. Matilda suddenly stands up and says, "Leave him alone, you BIG FAT BULLY!" Chaos ensues, and Matilda focuses

her gaze on Miss Trunchbull's glass, willing it to tip over. Suddenly it flies toward Miss Trunchbull and she runs out screaming.

Miss Honey dismisses the class before Miss Trunchbull returns, however Matilda remains behind. She asks Miss Honey if her abilities make her strange. They walk from school together and Miss Honey tells Matilda that she believes her abilities have to do with her incredible mind. Miss Honey then asks Matilda about her father, to which she explains that he is awful to her.

When they arrive at her cottage, Miss Honey explains how she came to be poor. She tells Matilda that she used to live with her father, Magnus, and her aunt in a beautiful house, but when her father died her aunt became her guardian. Her aunt was a mean and cruel woman and when Miss Honey got a job, her aunt gave her a bill outlining all the costs of raising her and made her sign a contract to pay back every penny. Desperate to get away, she found refuge in an old shed. Matilda realizes that the story she thought she made up about the Acrobat and the Escapologist was really a story about Miss Honey's parents, and her wicked aunt is Miss Trunchbull.

The next day at school, Miss Trunchbull administers a very difficult spelling test; anyone who gets just one letter wrong gets sent to the chokey. When Lavender makes a mistake, Miss Trunchbull starts to remove her, but before they get far, the other children purposely make mistakes, thinking that Miss Trunchbull cannot possibly put them all in the chokey. Suddenly, Miss Trunchbull reveals a wall of chokeys she has been building. They all freeze when they see chalk floating as it writes on the chalkboard, "Agatha, this is Magnus! Give my Jenny back her house, then leave, or I will get you like YOU

GOT ME!” to which Miss Trunchbull runs away terrified. The children rejoice as they resolve that Miss Trunchbull will never bully them again.

A little while later, Miss Honey receives a letter stating her parents’ will had been discovered and that she was the rightful owner of the beautiful house. Miss Trunchbull was never seen again and Miss Honey took over as headmistress of the school. Matilda was never again able to move things with her mind; she claimed it was because she no longer needed a super power.

The Wormwood’s suddenly arrive and Mr. Wormwood tells Matilda that they are fleeing to Spain forever because he sold the used cars to the Russian Mafia. Miss Honey offers to let Matilda live with her instead. The Russians, who have been chasing the Wormwoods, arrive unexpectedly and everyone hides except Matilda. Sergei, the head of the Mafia, explains to Matilda that her father is very stupid and he is surprised when she agrees with him.

Unfortunately, Michael, Matilda’s older brother, gives away their hiding location and the Russians drag them out of the bushes. While they are deciding what to do with Mr. Wormwood, Matilda interjects in Russian. Everyone is surprised and she explains that she taught herself the language from reading novels. Sergei is amazed and offers to ‘take care’ of her father for her, but Matilda says no, she’s “had enough of revenge.” The Russian Mafia leaves with a warning and Mr. Wormwood agrees to let Matilda stay with Miss Honey, forever.

Characters

Matilda Wormwood

The title character; a five-year-old intelligent, brave, and powerful young girl. Matilda has exceptional abilities and an innate sense of right and wrong

Miss Trunchbull

The tyrannical headmistress of Matilda's school; once a famous athlete, the terrifying Miss Trunchbull despises children and bullies both teachers and pupils

Miss Honey

Matilda's teacher; she is a quiet but warm person who is loved by every child she meets. She supports Matilda in her learning and believes in her exceptional abilities

Mr. Wormwood

Matilda's neglectful father; he is a bully to Matilda and a con-man car salesman who scams his customers

Mrs. Wormwood

Matilda's gold-digging mother; she is an inattentive parent who is more concerned with her appearance than her children

Michael Wormwood

Matilda's older brother; he is the favoured child and Mr. Wormwood is grooming him to follow in his footsteps

Mrs. Phelps

The local librarian; she is welcoming and encourages Matilda's advanced reading and storytelling

Rudolpho

Mrs. Wormwood's dance partner

Sergei

The head of the Russian mafia; he is intimidating and doesn't like when people underestimate his intelligence

Bruce Bogtrotter

One of Matilda's classmates; he is a trouble-maker and is forced by the Trunchbull to eat an entire cake in front of his class

Amanda Thripp

Another of Matilda's classmates; she gets in trouble with Miss Trunchbull and is thrown by her pigtailed

Lavender

One of Matilda's first friends at her new school; she is mischievous and courageous

Other minor characters include:

Escapologist, Acrobat, Acrobat's Sister, Henchmen, Teacher, Doctor, Nurse, Cook, Judge, Nigel, Eric, Alice, Hortensia, Tommy, Children's Entertainer, Parents, Big Kids, Scary Big Kid, Little Kids

Production History/Timeline

The writing process for *Matilda the Musical* began in 2009 when the Royal Shakespeare Company approached Dennis Kelly and Tim Minchin to create a stage adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. The musical underwent many changes throughout the year that followed, and by September 2010, rehearsals began. On December 9, 2010, *Matilda the Musical* opened at the Courtyard Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon to great acclaim. The following year, the production transferred to London's West End to make its debut, and by April 2013, *Matilda the Musical* opened on Broadway. Opening on May 16, 2019, *Matilda the Musical* marks the final show in the Arts Club's 2018/2019 Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage season.



Dennis Kelly: Playwright

Dennis Kelly is an award-winning writer, who adapted Roald Dahl's classic novel, *Matilda*, for the stage. Kelly was born in Barnet, North London to an Irish family. He left school at age 16 to work in Sainsbury's (the second largest grocery chain in the UK), and discovered theatre when he joined a local youth group.

By age 30, Kelly had graduation from Goldsmiths College, University of London with First Class Honours in Drama and Theatre Arts. He wrote his first play, *Debris* (2003), at the age of 30, and went on to write for film, theatre, and television. His sitcom *Pulling* aired on BBC Three and was nominated for a BAFTA TV Award in 2007. Kelly was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2009 to adapt *Matilda* into a stage musical, along with Tim Minchin.

Tim Minchin: Composer & Lyricist

Tim Minchin is an England-born, Australian-grown composer, lyricist, comedian, actor, writer, and director. He received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Western Australia, as well as an Advanced Diploma of Contemporary Music from Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts.

Throughout his 20s, Minchin spent his time primarily acting and performing music. When he couldn't find an agent or support for his album, he survived playing both keyboard and piano for various artists. In 2003 he created his first solo Fringe show, *Navel – Cerebral Melodies with Umbilical Chords*, and although it was only moderately successful, it inspired him to continue creating his own work. His show *Dark Side* (2005) became one of the most acclaimed comedy shows at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. In 2009 Minchin was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company to compose music and lyrics for the musical adaptation of *Matilda*.

THE CAST, ROYAL MTC, WINNIPEG;
PHOTO BY DYLAN HEWLETT



Roald Dahl:

Author

Matilda the Musical is based on Roald Dahl's classic 1988 children's novel *Matilda*. Roald Dahl's name can be recognized from a number of children's literary classics, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The BFG*, and *James and the Giant Peach*.

Born in 1916 in Llandaff, Wales, Dahl had a tragic early life with both his sister and his father passing away when he was a young boy. His mother only wanted the best for him and sent him to boarding school so he could get the best education possible. It was at the second boarding school he attended that Dahl and his classmates were invited to taste test chocolate, later providing the inspiration for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

After finishing school, Dahl set out to travel, which he did until World War 2 when he enlisted in the Royal Air Force at only 23 years of age. In 1940, Dahl was injured when his aircraft crashed in the desert. He was rescued and in recovery for six months. After his recovery he returned to action, and in 1942 he was assigned as an assistant at the British Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Dahl disliked his position in Washington and felt that he was doing unimportant work. Throughout 1942, Dahl worked in the United States, promoting Britain's interests to the American people. This work eventually

led him to supplying intelligence to MI6 and to Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Roald Dahl's first published work was a story of his adventures at war and appeared in the August 1942 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*. In 1943 he published his first children's book, *The Gremlins*. Parallel to his children's stories, Dahl wrote many adult short stories which were published in a variety of American magazines.

In 1946, Dahl was invalided from the RAF, and following his time at war he married actress Patricia Neal. Over the course of their marriage, Dahl and Neal had five children together. When Dahl and Neal divorced after 30 years, he married actress Felicity 'Liccy' Crosland.

In the 60s, Dahl wrote many of his famous novels, including *James and the Giant Peach* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. He also briefly wrote for the screen, writing films such as *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. He started adapting his own novel, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, for film but was unable to finish. As a result, he disliked how the movie turned out and refused any of his other stories be turned into films. He continued writing stories until his death from leukaemia on November 23, 1990, at the age of 74.

Many of Dahl's children's stories are told from the point of view of the child and are influenced by experiences from his childhood. He often used his writing to speak against different injustices in the world. *Matilda* was Dahl's last full-length children's novel.

Let's Chat About Bullying

Matilda the Musical, while being a story about a remarkable young girl who overcomes many obstacles, is also a tale of bullying. It's unfortunate to see that Matilda has had to deal with many bullies in her young life, starting the day she was born.

From the very beginning of her life, Mr. Wormwood is angry that Matilda is not a boy, and for the entirety of the production, he verbally insults her by calling her his 'son' after she has repeatedly asked him not to. Her brother gets all of her parents' love and affection, and she gets called a 'snot-nosed maggot.' At school, Matilda is terrorized by the headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, who insults and forces inhumane punishments on her and her classmates.

Although Matilda is remarkably intelligent and uniquely gifted, she does not possess the physical power or authority to free herself from her bullies. If she hadn't had her abilities to defeat Miss Trunchbull, and if Miss Honey hadn't rescued her from her family, the bullying may have eventually consumed her. Matilda isn't the only one being bullied in this story. Miss Honey is also the victim of bullying and understands what Matilda is enduring, both at school and at home.

Bullying is often categorized as a situation involving children, but as seen throughout this story, it can also occur between adults, just like the treatment Miss Honey receives from Miss Trunchbull at school. Bullying is described as persistent and repeated behaviour with negative or aggressive intent which is used to maintain power over another individual. Bullies choose to

antagonize those they see as vulnerable and find ways to exploit their vulnerability, just like Mr. Wormwood and Miss Trunchbull.

Today, bullying also happens online. Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of online technology and allows bullies to display their damaging messages to a more public audience. All forms of bullying need to be dealt with directly; it is a power struggle that is often difficult to resolve without the help of a third party. *Matilda the Musical* sends a positive message to those who have experienced, or are experiencing, any sort of bullying. By utilizing intelligence and courage, and with help from good, kind people, one can take a stand and overcome manipulation.

It's important to always consider how your own actions can effect others, and how you allow others to affect you. If you, or anyone you know, are enduring any form of bullying and are in need of help, contact the following resources for support:

Kids Help Phone: 1.800.668.6868 or kidshelpphone.ca

Greater Vancouver 24-Hour Crisis Line: 1.604.872.3311

Youth in BC Online Chat tool: youthinbc.com

Adult Online Crisis Chat tool: crisiscentrechat.ca