

THEATRE PRESS

Viewing and re-viewing Melbourne theatre

Melbourne Fringe 2016: BIG TOPS AND TINY TOTS

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Dynamic and endearing school holiday entertainment

By Kim Edwards

Luth Wolfe can do magic. And I don't just mean her nice slight-of-hand and neat balancing tricks – I mean, this woman can keep **several dozen highly excited preschoolers and preps under her spell for nearly an hour.** From the moment her energised and eager audience entered the drafty Emerald City performance space at the **North Melbourne Meat Market** performance venue, Wolfe made herself the centre of their attention with easy charm and cute banter. Only one small critic initially preferred to sit with mum in the seating behind while his peers **made themselves at home on the stage**, and even he changed his mind before long and also came to sit open-mouthed and engrossed at Wolfe's feet.

Big Tops and Tiny Tots is a slick, witty and well-constructed circus show aimed at kids aged 3 -6 that has been touring preschools and kindergartens before settling in for a **2016 Melbourne Fringe** season. Wolfe talks to and with her young audience skillfully, making eye contact, getting down to their level, and keeping their attention constantly focused as she invites responses, reactions and interactions. **Her chatting and clowning put the kids quickly at their ease:** they were on side and laughing just with her initial play at trying to put on her hat. The performance delivers a **well-balanced (pun intended) showcase of circus skills**, including juggling, magic, comedy, unicycling, hula-hooping, mime and plate-spinning, and each act is nicely set up in showing the kids how to appreciate the trick, and escalating the skills demonstrated.

I also admired the subtle didactic elements Wolfe works in, explaining abilities, **playing the fool to allow the kids to correct her**, introducing boundaries and safety rules, and – particularly in a screen-time world – teaching the next generation of live-theatre patrons how to be an audience, **all in fun and funny ways.** There is lots to love about this show: **Wolfe is a talented performer and comedian**, and her experience and enthusiasm are palpable. My one significant criticism – and I'm ambivalent about it – would be the flat-rate price. As a theatre-maker, **I believe passionately in supporting artists** and that kids' performers often have to work even harder to engage their audience, but as a mum, I know no concession or discount makes it difficult for bigger families to enjoy such outings.

That said, *Big Tops and Tiny Tots* is a great little live show for the mere price of a movie ticket, **your kids will love it**, and they might even have the chance for a starring role as well.

Most importantly though, this was the critique of my esteemed reviewing colleague:

My favourite thing was the hula hoops. She also did funny things with her hat, and on a big wheel. She made me laugh!(Miss Four)

See?

Magic, I tell you.

VENUE: Emerald City – Meat Market
5 Blackwood St, Melbourne

DATES: September 17 – 18th & 20 – 25th

TIME: 1.30pm

TICKETS: Visit melbournefringe.com.au

All tickets: \$14.99

Image by **Jayrow Photography**

N. B. Bear in mind the venue is chilly, the coffee van isn't open until after the show, and there was some fire-exit access concerns expressed about taking in prams, so arm yourselves with warm clothes, drink bottles, and other carry options for younger siblings.

