



The Man Who Knows It All, Unicorn Theatre



Regardless of your thoughts on European theatre's influence on our island's stages, it's impossible to deny it's happening. Unicorn Theatre is one venue that isn't shying away from international influence and experimentation in theatre for children and young people – they're embracing it. Work produced and booked here challenges expectations of the genre and doesn't patronise its young audiences.

Dutch company Theatre Artemis are no exception to their ethos. Understated clowning, public failure and live music create a metatheatrical world of mediocrity that is meant to be challenged. A musician supports a showman that claims to know it all, but who really can only partially list items in categories like 'colours' and 'weather', and bumbles up counting in several languages. A hapless stagehand tries to help when not interrupting with offstage crashes and bangs.

The young audience laugh at their misfortunes and shout out corrections to their mistakes. The minimalist set and small performances are the opposite of bright sets and exaggerated performances normally seen in children's theatre, but this show proves that kids are able to respond to more subtle, detailed work. The adults in the audience (this one included) take more time to adjust to the aesthetic used here, but the small movements in the physical comedy, moments of absurdity and gradual deterioration of their world inevitably engages our attention.

To deliberately make work that children will contradict is brave – there are times where shouting children overwhelm the nearly-whispered lists, and the audience teeters on the edge of chaos. The work asks children to question adults when they are wrong, empowering them with confidence to challenge authority and to challenge the default of respecting their elders.

Quietly radical in its approach, this show is part of a growing sea change in children's theatre. Progressive work that experiments with form and genre is steadily manifesting in work for young audiences, making this genre one of the most consistently innovative. *The Man Who Knows It All* captivates in its subtlety and subversion, challenging audiences of all ages to speak up against what is wrong.

The Man Who Knows It All runs through 4 June.