

MATILDA Director's Notes
Christopher J. Murphy, Director
Assistant Director/Director of Outreach for Fort Wayne Youtheatre

I've never been a fan of the term "children's theatre." After all, good theatre is supposed to engage and entertain the entire audience...and how many kids go to the theatre by themselves? At Fort Wayne Youtheatre, we strive, rather, to produce "family-friendly theatre," appealing to children AND the adults sitting beside them. We're excited to bring this same philosophy to this collaboration with our friends at the Civic Theatre.

I can't think of a piece that embodies this broad appeal better than **Matilda**, based on the beloved book by Roald Dahl. Dahl's work shines a light on childhood, while never shying away from the dark edges. He doesn't whitewash life for his audience, regardless of their age. Who didn't love the film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* for the songs and sets as a kid, only to rediscover just how subversive and hilarious it was as an adult? In works from *James and the Giant Peach* to *The BFG*, Dahl doesn't talk down to his audience. Kids love him because he doesn't lie. Kids are constantly lied to, but Dahl says, "Life's hard...but you can manage."

With **Matilda**, we've tried to create an anthem to creative imagination. It's creativity and the power of her mind that set Matilda free and change her world. Matilda is a little girl with a terrible life- almost Dickensian, with these horrid parents, an oafish brother, and a monstrous headmistress. But using books and her own imagination, she not only creates an escape from her circumstances, but eventually creates the world in which she wants to live- a world in which she can be happy. We ALL have that power. Real life problems may not be overcome in two hours of singing and dancing, but a single thought starts to change the world.

Our rehearsal room has been a perfect little microcosm of this idea. Fill a room with a Youtheatre director, a Dance Collective choreographer, a Civic music director and 33 wildly inventive actors ranging from age 8 to...well...more than 8...and it's been one of the most delightfully creative experiences of my career. What fun it is to see these kids learn from their adult co-stars; and to watch these adults be inspired by the fresh-faced youngsters.

I tell my youngest students that acting is just playing "make believe," like pretending to be Superman or hosting princess tea parties with their teddy bears at home. It's been a joy creating that same childlike environment onstage and off at **Matilda**. This amazing cast, led by our two fearless (*alternating*) leading ladies totally embraces the fact that they're called "plays" for a reason! Together, they've created characters you'll love (*or love to hate*) in a story with heart and humor told through witty songs and dazzling dances. This is theatre for, as they used to say at the circus, "children of ALL ages." I hope you'll join us...and let YOUR imagination run wild!

February 15-March 1

Fort Wayne Youtheatre

CIVIC theatre
(260) 424-5220
fwcivic.org

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Book by Dennis Kelly

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