

Director's Note

Live theater has had a rough couple of years. Following the 2020 pandemic shutdown of all theaters, Broadway to Brighton, filling theaters across the country is still a tough sell. So we as an artistic team are so grateful you've chosen to spend your evening with us here at Brighton High celebrating the joys of childhood and the pleasures of being "revolting." As the "new guy," to the program, directing my first show here at Brighton, I've been so impressed with the dedication and commitment to excellence shown by every single member of the cast and crew. We've battled through a lot of adversity in the nearly three months since auditions in late November, but the end product has brought us so much joy.

The best thing about putting on a show is how collaborative it is, and how there are so many stakeholders in the end product. When one member of the cast, or crew, or pit band, or directing team, is absent, everyone must pull together to make sure the show doesn't miss a beat, literally. And that's been the case for *Matilda*. Despite sub-freezing temperatures, college auditions, snowy roads, fire alarms, illness, and more adversity, we have pulled together to bring you our very best this show. That's also a credit to the Family Uber drivers who have made sure actors and crew were at every rehearsal.

As Artistic Director, I'm indebted to the fabulous team of creative individuals who have also brought their best to this show – Judy Shomper, Jessica Padilla, Ben Meixell, Jack Witmer, Sarah Staebell, Alison Cuchiarale, Peggy Zorn, and Sandy Hellman. You are truly a dream to work with, and your passion for theater is inspiring.

Finally, as you settle in to enjoy our production of *Matilda*, I'd be remiss if the writer and English teacher in me didn't direct your attention to some key lines from the musical, sung by Matilda herself:

*In the slip of a bolt, there's a tiny revolt
The seed of a war in a creak of a floorboard,
A storm can begin with a flap of a wing
The tiniest mite packs the mightiest sting
Every day starts with a tick of a clock
All escapes start with the click of a lock*

We can all learn from the brave little girl at the heart of this story, whose courage and spunk change the lives of everyone she meets.

That's revolting, indeed.

Enjoy the show,
Glenn McCarty



Dramaturgical Review for Roald Dahl's, *Matilda*

By Raphael Knauf

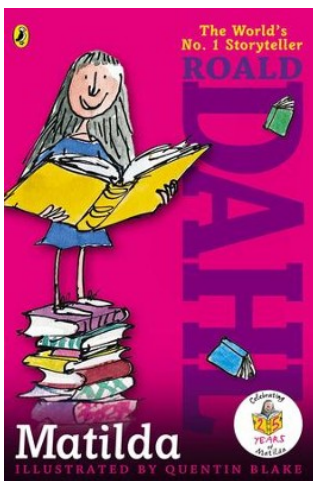
The Controversy

Brighton High School acknowledges for a long and unjustifiable time, the vast popularity of Roald Dahl's books and their adaptations overshadowed the author's inexcusable prejudices and bigotry. In multiple interviews, Dahl has admitted to being anti-Semitic and has used his platform to share his anti-Semitic views. Upon his death in 1990, Andrew Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, wrote in a letter to *The New York Times*, "Praise for Mr. Dahl as a writer must not obscure the fact that he was a bigot." Dahl's family and the Roald Dahl Story Company would release a long overdue apology on the official Dahl website in December 2020, thirty years after the author's death. It reads, "The Dahl family and the Roald Dahl Story Company deeply apologise for the lasting and understandable hurt caused by Roald Dahl's anti-Semitic statements. Those prejudiced remarks are incomprehensible to us and stand in marked contrast to the man we knew and to the values at the heart of Roald Dahl's stories, which have positively impacted young people for generations. We hope that, just as he did at his best, at his absolute worst, Roald Dahl can help remind us of the lasting impact of words." While his books are not credited with being overtly antisemitic, they have been cited for having misogynistic and racist content. His editor Stephen Roxburgh has been attributed for cutting out such content from Dahl's novels including *The Witches*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and the *BFG*.

The Novel's History

Before its movie, musical, and movie musical adaptations *Matilda* was a children's novel. Released in 1988, the book was well-received by audiences. Its author, Roald Dahl, was already well accomplished with having already written popular titles such as *James and the Giant Peach*, *The BFG*, and *The Witches*. In an interview with NPR, Lucy Dahl, one of Dahl's children, cited the novel as one of the most difficult books he had to write. She recalls he wrote a letter to her in 1986 complaining about needing to scrap the second half of his draft because it wasn't good enough for the first half. Two years later *Matilda* would be published. Regarding Dahl's motivations and inspiration for *Matilda*, Lucy believed he wanted to write about his fear that books were going to disappear one day. Although considering the initial storyline cast *Matilda* as a villainous child who terrorized her parents with her psychokinetic powers and aided her teacher in winning money at horse racing, Roald Dahl's motivation might have been an afterthought. *Matilda*'s name was even inspired by a poem titled "Matilda Who Told Such Dreadful Lies" by Hilaire Belloc. If it weren't

for Dahl's editor Stephen Roxburgh's recommendation to make *Matilda* an innocent child who loved books and gained her supernatural powers through enduring her parent's abuse. In 2012, *Matilda* was ranked 30 in a survey of the best children's novels published by the *School Library Journal*. *Time* magazine included *Matilda* in its list of 100 Best Young-Adult Books of all time in 2019. Since its publication, the book has sold 17 million copies worldwide in 2018 with a particular spike in 2016. It started to outsell all of Dahl's other books.



First, a Film



Probably one of the most famous adaptations would be 1996 Danny DeVito's *Matilda*. The actor/director decided to make the book a movie when his young daughter brought the book home in the 1990s. He thought that if he were to make a movie for his kids, *Matilda* would be the one and the roles for the Wormwoods would be perfect for him and his wife, Rhea Perlman. Danny DeVito co-produced, directed, and performed in the movie. The film focused on Matilda's telekinetic powers and was marketed as a fantasy comedy movie. It was aimed at "tween" audiences and did not do too well at the box office which earned \$33.5 million, slightly less than the movie's \$36 million budget. In more recent years it has become more popular with its current score being 7/10 on IMDb. On Rotten Tomatoes, the movie is rated 91%.

Second, a Musical Adaptation for the Stage

In 2009, The Royal Shakespeare Company originally reached out to Dennis Kelly, a theater and TV writer, to write a book for a musical adaptation with a score to be added later. After a year and a half, the script was completed and presented to director Matthew Warchus who found Tim Minchin, Australian musician, and comedian at London's Bloomsbury Theatre, and asked him to compose the music for *Matilda*. Minchin who was already a fan of Dahl's work, and had recently read the book, agreed. He would attend several workshops and learn how songs fit into a musical libretto. The show would have a twelve-week trial run by the Royal Shakespeare Company from November 2010 to January 2011. The production would later be transferred to West End's Cambridge Theatre and would premiere in November of 2011. In February 2012, the producers announced *Matilda* would be going "across the pond" and opening on Broadway at the Shubert Theatre in 2013. Unlike the 1996 movie, the musical focuses more on Matilda's experiences as an abuse survivor and a righteous revolutionary than on her telekinetic powers. The London production would win several 2012 Laurence Olivier Awards including Best New Musical, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Actress. The Broadway production would win several Tony awards such as Best Book of a Musical, Best Featured Actor in a Musical, Best Scenic Design of a Musical, and Best Lighting Design of a Musical.



And Now, the Movie Musical



In more recent news, the musical received a movie adaption by Netflix directed by Matthew Warchus. After a limited theater release on December 9, 2022, it arrived at the Netflix streaming service on December 25, 2022. The movie scored 92% on Rotten Tomatoes and 6.5/10 on IMDb. The creators of the musical, Matthew Warchus, Dennis Kelly, and Tim Minchin, all had the privilege of overseeing the film adaptation. To better suit the movie format and more contemporary audience tastes, they ended up reimagining and changing the script, and reconceptualizing their music. In interviews, they were noted saying that they enjoyed having the chance

to do new things with the story. They even included a new song, “Still Holding My Hand,” which often happens with musical film adaptations so they will qualify for academy award consideration.

Final Thoughts

Be it the children’s novel, the movie, the musical, or the movie musical, *Matilda* has captured hearts with its themes of standing up for what’s right, valuing the power and resilience every child holds, and the importance of literature. Brighton High School is happy to present audiences with a wonderful show. Thank you for coming and supporting the arts.

