

Review: The Woman in Black

[Kate Barlow](#) reviews the infamously chilling *The Woman in Black*

Tuesday 18 November 2014



Photo Credit: Tristram Kenton

Venue: York Theatre Royal

★★★★★

Having celebrated 25 years on the West End stage to both astounding success and absolute terror, this week York's Theatre Royal plays host to the chilling *The Woman in Black*. Adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill, the play's reputation precedes it as being a master class in spine-tingling suspense. It certainly lives up to its repute.

The play follows a solicitor, Mr Kipps, sent to a mysterious isolated house to wind up the affairs of a deceased woman. Unable to gain assistance from the cold and unfriendly locals, Kipps is forced to enter the house alone, where he soon encounters ghostly affairs. The story, however, picks up years later, as Kipps unites with a director and actor in order to recount his terrifying tale through the medium of theatre.

The frame narrative is used to great effect, essentially making this a play within a play, causing the appearance of the woman in black to be all the more haunting (accentuated further by a surprise ending that makes you squirm in your seat). With only three very talented actors, minimal furniture and a handful of costumes, the two lead actors Malcolm James and Matt Connor's transition between characters smoothly and with ease. This is a play testament to how much can be done with such a limited set. The use of lighting (a scene where the shadow of a hand is magnified onto the backdrop creates a particularly

erie effect) and sound are both essential to the thrills and surprises created. The host of audience members screaming in the theatre around you at particularly terrifying moments certainly also helps to create an atmosphere.

While the play has slow but surprisingly humorous beginnings, it soon gathers pace and tension. Although the initial measured pace may make you feel like you're gagging for a bit of terror, it allows the anticipation to really develop. By the second act, as Kipps finds himself walking around the house alone at night, the suspense truly hits and makes for a nail-biting second half.

One of the truly memorable aspects of *The Woman in Black* is that it is itself a tale of the process of creating a play and the use of imagination necessary for the magic of theatre. Tensely terrifying, surprisingly funny, and fantastically acted, it is witness to the effectiveness of minimalist theatre and the genuine emotion that can be created.



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