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By

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Theater review

The challenge in adapting a well-loved children's book is to create something new without disappointing the specific expectations of a built-in audience. Roald Dahl's "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" has already [spawned two high-profile movie adaptations](#) and even [an opera](#). Like previous adaptations, the touring musical "Roald Dahl's 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,'" running through Aug. 11 at Seattle's Paramount Theatre, is funny, entertaining and a little odd, but doesn't quite capture Dahl's unique blend of childish delight and wicked humor.

The musical from the award-winning creative team of director Jack O'Brien and "Hairspray" songwriters Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman combines original songs with tunes from the 1971 film starring Gene Wilder. The plot mostly follows the 1964 children's book, but ideas from both movies are sprinkled throughout.

In all versions of the story, impoverished Charlie Bucket, along with four obnoxious other children, wins a golden ticket to visit the

mysterious Willy Wonka candy factory accompanied by his Grandpa Joe (in this production, a tall-tale-telling Methuselah played by James Young). One by one, the other children misbehave and are (sometimes fatally) eliminated. When all the just desserts have been delivered, Wonka gives the factory to Charlie.



The cast of Roald Dahl's "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," at the Paramount Theatre through Aug. 11. (Joan Marcus)

The most original element of this production is the introduction of a deeper relationship between Charlie and Willy Wonka, who, disguised as a candy seller, befriends Charlie during the contest. The 2005 film's moral about family didn't work artistically, but this production stays closer to the whimsy of the original by focusing on Charlie as an inventive kindred spirit to Wonka.

Opening with the well-known song "The Candy Man" guarantees immediate buy-in from the audience. Some of the new songs, like "If Your Father Were Here" (beautifully sung by Amanda Rose as Mrs. Bucket) hit the emotional beats of Broadway but seem a bit too sweet for Dahl's snarky world. The stylistically eclectic numbers introducing the golden-ticket winners perfectly capture the flavor of their characters, most of whom have been updated for contemporary times.

My kids — ages 15 and 10 — were charmed, rather than repulsed, by Daniel Quadrino's hacker Mike Teavee and Brynn Williams' social media chewing-gum celebrity Violet Beauregard. (Madeleine Doherty's alcoholic helicopter mom Mrs. Teavee was a high point for me.) Veruca Salt's "fatal flaw" of being spoiled rotten is timeless but actor Jessica Cohen's portrayal of her as a ballet-dancing daughter of a Russian tycoon felt contemporary. Only Augustus Gloop (Matt Wood) remained unchanged, the victim of fat shaming as anachronistic as Mrs. Teavee's wardrobe.

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Noah Weisberg has a better singing voice than Gene Wilder but his Wonka often seems modeled on Wilder's performance. At other times, Weisberg's Wonka reminded me of Jeff Goldblum, but fortunately, there is almost nothing of Johnny Depp's wrong kind of creepy from the 2005 movie.

Although grave errors were made in that film, at least Tim Burton had a consistent aesthetic, which this production — which never seems able to settle on a tone — could have used. Sophisticated digital elements jostle against old-school stage tricks; Looney Tunes wackiness bumps up against sideways social commentary. Like the eclectic selections on a candy store shelf, individual elements work, but don't always work together.

My kids shared none of my quibbles. The 10-year-old was sold before the curtain rose when Charlie (Rueby Wood, who received a standing ovation on opening night) encouraged us to eat candy during the show. The 15-year-old looked up performers' Instagram accounts during intermission. Everyone loved the Oompa Loompas, created through the aforementioned stage tricks, and freed from the uncomfortable whiff of servitude through a song in which they negotiate salary.

"Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" has always posed a problem to adults; the logic of the chocolate factory ceases to make sense past a certain age. Adults might enjoy this version of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," but kids will almost certainly love it.

"Roald Dahl's 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,'" through Aug. 11; Paramount Theatre, 911 Pine St., Seattle; tickets start at \$30; 800-982-2787, stgpresents.org

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