



Matilda the Musical

Well, I need to begin this review the same way I started my last one about a Wine Country Theater production: they've done it again—and they really have.

There are shows that entertain you. And then there are shows that practically gather you—pull you in, hold you there, and leave you feeling like you just witnessed something special. That's what happened with their production of *Matilda the Musical*. It's been a while since I've had so many talented people to talk about, and even now I'm not sure I can fully capture what it felt like to watch this cast work. It was one of those nights where every time you thought, "Okay... that performance was great," another performer would step in and raise the bar again.

If you've read my reviews before, you know I usually mention a couple of standouts. But this time? I feel the need to talk about five. Five! That might honestly be a record.

So let me start with Jon Estes as Miss Trunchbull. Jon didn't just play Trunchbull—he inhabited her. He achieved that rare balance where the character is undeniably terrifying, yet somehow still delivered with just enough theatrical mischief that you can't help but be captivated. There was a kind of "perfectly horrible" charm to the way he dealt with the kids—like he was setting out to break every rule in the most delightfully vicious way possible. It didn't feel mean for the sake of meanness. It felt like comedy with teeth, and it absolutely captured the hearts of everyone in the audience.

Then of course there was Tara Brinkman as Miss Honey, and honestly, she brought something the show needed immediately: warmth, sincerity, and a voice that could hold a room. Her performance felt real—not just "acted," but lived in. Every line landed with intention, and her vocal work was so captivating that it made you lean in without even realizing you were doing it. Watching her work was like watching a confident professional tell the story from the inside—every note carried meaning, every moment felt purposeful, and the audience visibly enjoyed being guided by her.

Next came Scott Saunders as Mr. Wormwood, and he truly deserves his own paragraph because he played him to selfish perfection. Saunders took the character's flaws and sharpened them into something both comedic and chilling—without turning him into a cartoon. There was a playfulness to his performance that caught us off guard at first, the way Wormwood can seem almost charming in his own oblivious way, until you realize exactly what he's doing and how badly he misses the point. And then—boom—he'd hit that timing, that attitude, that theatrical "I don't care" energy, and the whole room would light up. It was the kind of performance that thrilled you and surprised you in the same breath.

Speaking of the Wormwoods, Samantha Simmons as Mrs. Wormwood was excellent as well. Samantha brought freshness to every scene, giving the character range and texture so she didn't feel stuck in a one-note role. What impressed me most was her creativity—the choices she made gave Mrs. Wormwood dimension, like she wasn't just there to be oppositional to the heroes, but fully formed as a person. She

had the ability to shift the character's flavor from moment to moment, which made the whole family dynamic richer and more entertaining.

And then—because I'm not exaggerating when I say I saved the best for last—there was Quinn Newman in the title role as Matilda.

From the moment she stepped into the story, my mouth stayed open in awe. Not just because she could sing or because she could act—but because she seemed to know exactly what the show required emotionally, physically, and rhythmically. She didn't just deliver her performance; she moved with it. She nailed the blocking, she interacted with the adult cast members with confidence and timing that felt beyond her years, and she made every moment on stage feel like Matilda had agency, heart, and a clear presence of her own. Her singing was strong, her character work was captivating, and her stage awareness was remarkable.

Pretty good for a girl who hasn't even graduated from the 5th grade yet—honestly, it's almost unfair to the rest of us.

I loved this Musical. Truly loved it.

And it's impossible not to notice that Wine Country Theater is getting better and better. Executive Director Cynthia Anthony is making all the right moves—because this kind of polished, enthusiastic, talent-packed production doesn't happen by accident. It happens when standards are high, casting is sharp, and the whole operation is moving in the right direction. Speaking of direction.

The Director and Choreographer "Doriana Sanchez" took care of creative business with this production. She demands the best out of her performers and boy did she get it this time. Her background speaks volumes. Working with legendary icon "Cher" and on Broadway, Radio City Music Hall, oh and did I mention she was nominated for an Emmy. Yes this production had a true Captain steering the ship. Impressive would be an understatement.

Drew Brewer Hudson-Publisher

The Drew Review gives *Matilda the Musical* five out of 5 stars.