

# Review: Seasonal Fun with Charlie & Lola

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Charlie & Lola's Extremely New Play

BBC World Wide and Polka Theatre

7 June 2014, 2pm

Run: 3-15 June

DBS Arts Centre, Home of the SRT

How do you translate a well-known cartoon from the small screen to the stage? Actors wearing mascot-like costumes? Employing the latest technology to create holograms on stage? How about doing it the old-school way with puppets that look like elaborate 2D cardboard cut-outs?

To be honest, I did not expect much from the puppets after seeing the publicity photo (see above) that was sent to me. How does something so basic satisfy this generation of younglings that are addicted to their iPads from the moment they know how to move their fingers? Therein lies the artistry of Polka Theatre.

The various storylines of the show are based on the theme of seasons. From the main characters witnessing the coming of autumn to Lola and Lotta acting in a school play about the four seasons, I found the plot refreshingly children-friendly (which I cannot say the same for some cartoons nowadays).

The main draw for me was the puppets; deceptively simple in appearance yet incredibly versatile. They are able to bend, swing, dart their eyes, and even change facial expressions. While the stage may first appear to be slightly crowded with puppeteers, one soon appreciates the need for that many due to the subtlety of movements that really brought the characters to life. The puppeteers also exhibited a keen sense of timing and all the movements were well-coordinated with the spoken track without a hitch. I am still amazed by the sleight of hand they managed to pull off by surreptitiously changing the mouth of the characters when their mood changes. The change was hardly noticed and I often had to do a double-take when I realised the puppets went from smiling to sulking. It is a waste that a programme booklet was not provided for this production as I will be more than happy to mention the names of the puppeteers here.

Aside from the handling of the puppets, the set design and scene transitions must be commended. Initially, I did not think much of it as it was a simple set-up and snow was rendered by the images on the screen and a white cloth covering the set. However, the constant "oohs" and "ahs" that can be heard reminded me that such simple tricks are still

magical to the children. Nothing sums it up better than when my fellow critic – in the guise of my four-year-old nephew – said, “I like the show because of the snow. I[‘ve] never see[n] snow before and I like it.”

Yet, there were three things that marred my enjoyment of the show. Firstly, the show is a little long. It felt as if I was watching four episodes of the cartoon back-to-back and that is quite demanding for children to sit in an enclosed space. My nephew got quite restless in the last ten minutes and repeatedly asked if the show has ended whenever there is a scene change.

Secondly, the volume of the speaking track should be turned up a little. It is a children’s play and kids tend to talk or ask questions during the show. I was not able to hear some of the lines and this may result in the younger children not knowing what is going on at all.

Lastly, and definitely most unnecessarily, I was constantly distracted by the ushers flashing their torchlights at patrons who are taking pictures or videos of the production. I am dismayed by lack of courtesy displayed by the parents (who are supposed to be the adults). Bringing your child to watch a show is not a convenient diversion that allows you to stop being a parent for the duration of the show. The theatre experience is a magical one and a wonderful educational opportunity for your child especially when they start to differentiate the medium of live performance in contrast to cinema or TV. Furthermore, teaching your child theatre etiquette (by example) can very well be his or her first lesson in conducting oneself appropriate to the situation at hand.

Despite these minor irritations, I still recommend it for children between 3-6 years old. Aside from its artistry, the show does pack in little surprises that your young ones will love which are best enjoyed at the center of the stall seats. With a little make-believe, *Charlie & Lola’s Extremely New Play* will usher in a season of fun for your young ones this school holiday.

*Charlie & Lola’s Extremely New Play runs till 15 June. Ticketing details at [Sistic](#).*