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Not enough magic in "The Magic Bookshop"

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The Magic Bookshop by Monkeyshine Theatre
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The Magic Bookshop by Monkeyshine Theatre

Rating: ★★★★★

Cramped behind the counter of their busy bookshop, Peter and John organise the wealth of books that arrive every day, determining those which can be saved and those which, reluctantly, are doomed for the shredder. Peter and John love books. They want their young audience to love books too. They want them to understand the importance of taking good care of their books. Understand how books tell the stories they tell. Thoughtful and ambitious, Monkeyshine Theatre's 'The Magic Bookshop' shows high and worthy aspirations. Part puppet show, part theatre, part telling of fairy stories and part story analysis, in Peter and John, it offers two engaging book lovers for its younger audience to relate to. But while it's all lovely and charming, and certainly captivates the very, very young, there's a real sense of an opportunity missed here with 'The Magic Bookshop' becoming a victim of its own, self-imposed constraints.

Behind their cramped and claustrophobic bookshop counter Peter and John vie for elbow room, like two figures in a Punch and Judy booth. Here, from the chest up, they serve as visible puppet masters, manipulating books and various papier mache items made from pages of books that couldn't be salvaged. A castle, a bed, a princess, a forest, each a recurring motif in the unfinished snippets of fairy tales they regale their young audience with. Indeed, that seems to be point of 'The Magic Bookshop.' It's not about the 'Princess and the Pea' or 'Sleeping Beauty,' it's not even about books at all. It's about deconstructing classic fairy tales into their shared components and recurring motifs for a very young audience. Most of whom it passes right over their heads.

While built around the telling of stories 'The Magic Bookshop' doesn't itself have a story to tell. Indeed, there's no real action to speak of. For the most part 'The Magic Bookshop' is closed for business, with Peter and John talking to the audience during their tea break. In opting for this route Kareen Pennefather has crafted a show that often feels stiff and claustrophobic, a talking head piece you sit back and listen to rather than watch or engage with. But Pennefather does elicit some engaging performances from James Jobson and Nicholas Kavanagh as its book saving superheroes Peter and John, as well as an excellent lighting design by Michael Cummins.

For its efforts to encourage its young audience to read and to engage with stories, 'The Magic Bookshop' is certainly to be applauded. As a theatrical piece, 'The Magic Bookshop,' when contrasted with the wealth of other imaginative and inventive productions aimed at young audiences, isn't as strong or as imaginative as it might have been. But if the magic isn't as strong here as in other Monkeyshine Theatre productions, 'The Magic Bookshop' still manages to engage the very, very young, has two strong performances and the book swap at the end of the show is a nice way to end off proceedings.

'The Magic Bookshop' by Monkeyshine Theatre is currently on tour. Aimed at those 5 years of age and over.

For more information on dates, times, venues and tickets, visit [Monkeyshine Theatre](#)



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