

## Audio introduction to the Royal Shakespeare Company production of MATILDA

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[Track 2] Welcome to this introduction to the audio described performance of the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of **Roald Dahl's Matilda The Musical**, with book by Dennis Kelly, and music and lyrics by Tim Minchin.

The performance is approximately two hours and thirty minutes, including an interval of twenty minutes.

Building blocks and letters are the theme for the colourful set. The front of the stage looks like the mouth of a large cave plastered with letter tiles. The tiles are piled higgledy-piggledy over the walls each side of the stage and across the ceiling above it. They are different sizes and colours: there are children's building blocks, Scrabble tiles, tiles with elaborate Victorian-style letters, tiles with letters written in felt pen, and some with musical notes. Words can be picked out from the jumble of letters, that all crop up in Matilda's story, including: *dynamite*, *atmosphere*, *escape*, *acrobat*,

*phenomenon* and *dangerous*. When we arrive, more brightly lit letter tiles hang at different heights above the stage, spelling the name MATILDA.

The back walls and floor of the stage are made from square blocks of wood fitted together. As we enter the auditorium a few of the floor squares are lit in different colours and have letters from Matilda's name on them. Later some of the larger floor squares rise up to become the tops of school desks in Matilda's classroom, with smaller ones for seats.

The scenery at the back is mainly painted on flat cutouts, which slide in from the sides. At the start of the play, the back wall is hidden by tall bookshelves, crammed with books with blank spines.

Pieces of furniture and props are used to create the different places in the story. At the beginning, two long tables stand end to end to make a party table. The floor-length white tablecloth has the word 'birthday' written on it in big red letters. For one scene later in the play, four playground swings hang at the front of the stage: the children stand on them and swing out over the audience while they sing.

**MATILDA WORMWOOD**, the book's heroine, is an exceptionally clever five-year-old, who lives with her parents and older brother Michael in a small town. Despite her young age and small size, and her parents' lack of interest in her, Matilda is a very confident little girl, sure of her own abilities, and not really aware of how unusual she is. She has a sweet face and long hair. At first dressed in a plain cotton dress and Start-Rite sandals, she

soon begins school and always wears her Crunchem Hall school uniform like the other first years.

Matilda's parents, Mr and Mrs Wormwood, are in their late thirties. Both are tall, thin and energetic, with hard faces and sharp, angular bodies.

**MR. WORMWOOD**, a used-car salesman, is dressed in a green and black checked suit, worn with a blue waistcoat trimmed with the same check, and a white shirt and tie. His socks and jacket lining are the same bright blue. A brown trilby hat and brown winkle picker shoes complete his look, along with gold cufflinks and signet ring, and a diamond stud in his left ear. Mr. Wormwood's hair is brushed up into a quiff.

**MRS. WORMWOOD'S** love of salsa dancing is reflected in her clothes. She wears a flounced, flowery blouse in bright pink and blue silk, with a purple skirt, which is slit to mid-thigh, revealing her shiny pink fishnet tights. She wears high-heeled, sparkly blue shoes. The skirt can be whipped off to display a fringed, silver miniskirt with large pink hearts at the front and back. Mrs. Wormwood's hair style is platinum blonde with dark roots, and it is piled into a tower on top of her head, with a cascade of ringlets falling over one shoulder.

**MICHAEL WORMWOOD**, Matilda's older brother, is his parents' favourite. He is a lazy, gormless youth, who spends his time slumped in an armchair, eyes glued on the old-fashioned TV set, even when it isn't showing anything. His expression is vacant, and he is always the last to catch on. Michael wears baggy jeans and a red, hooded sweatshirt with the word

'GENIUS' in white across the chest. A yellow baseball cap, worn back-to-front, covers his lank brown hair.

The Wormwoods' **sitting room** has a back wall made from another pile of blocks, covered with green-patterned wallpaper. Grey stone blocks make a frame for the fireplace, which has black squares in the middle with the word SOOT written across them. Three large flying ducks, made of plastic, are fixed to the wall, together with a brightly-coloured portrait of a lady's face. The mantelpiece is crammed with ornaments – souvenirs from holidays, models of Spanish dancing ladies and plastic flowers. On either side of the room are two bright orange armchairs with lime-green cushions. Facing them at the front of the stage is the TV set, placed on a fluffy lime green rug.

In contrast, **Matilda's room** is decorated in peaceful shades of blue – blue wall-papered blocks for the back wall, a matching blue bed and cover, and blue bedside table on the left of the bed with a small lamp on it. The head of the bed is against the wall, with a shelf above it, sturdy enough for Matilda to sit on. It holds a row of plain white books. On the back of each book is a letter; reading along the row, the letters spell the words *library books*.

A pop-up wall at the front creates the Wormwood's scruffy bathroom. This wall is also made from square blocks, the lower ones covered in peeling wood-effect wallpaper, the higher ones see-through. The word *Hers* is on the right-hand side, and the word *His* on the left.

**[Track 3] RUDOLPHO** is Mrs. Wormwood's dancing partner. His athletic figure is dressed in skin-tight, black, leather trousers, their wide flares studded with glittering rhinestones. His long-sleeved black shirt is close-fitting, and unbuttoned nearly to the waist, revealing a heavy gold medallion and chain. His long, dark hair is shoulder-length and he is clean-shaven, with sharp sideburns.

**MRS. PHELPS** is the librarian who first encourages Matilda in her love of reading. She has the kind face of a good listener. She wears multi-coloured layers of patterned clothes, topped by a long cardigan. Her mass of corkscrew curls is held back from her face with a patterned scarf. Mrs Phelps pads around her library in converse trainers, pushing a metal trolley of books for shelving, but she is always ready to leave them, pull up a seat and listen to Matilda's stories.

In the library, the tall bookshelves slide across the back, and the library clock appears with the letters T-I-M-E, instead of the figures 12, 3, 6 and 9. Large wooden alphabet blocks in different sizes are used as seats. For the story Matilda tells Mrs Phelps, she first uses two ragdoll puppets about 30cm tall, to act it out; later her two characters come to life and join her in telling the story. They are:

**THE ESCAPOLOGIST**, who is a circus performer in a red leotard over a sparkling, white body suit. Over this goes a sparkling red cape and a glittering, red top hat, with a crown made up of padlocks, keys and chains – the tools of his trade. He also wears a distinctive white silk scarf with silver embroidery, a gift from his beloved wife. And **THE ACROBAT**, who is the

Escapologist's wife, a tall, beautiful woman. Her performance costume is flame coloured satin; with it she wears a spectacular headdress composed of sparkling sticks of dynamite amid flame-coloured ostrich feathers.

Another visitor to the library is **MISS HONEY** who is soon to become Matilda's teacher at Crunchem Hall. Miss Honey lives up to her name with her shiny, honey-coloured hair falling straight from its side parting to just below her shoulders. Her modest, retiring character is expressed in her quiet clothes, a knee-length flower-print dress, pale pink tights and a fluffy, pink cardigan. She often wears round, gold-rimmed spectacles which she keeps on a cord round her neck.

Miss Honey's home is a rundown hut. It is set on a platform three metres square, raised half a metre off the stage. The only furniture is a camping stove and some old wooden crates for tables and chairs. Her bed is a mattress on the floor. Behind the house, stretching across the stage, is a wall of blocks with an image of the brown clapperboard hut, a white fence and a flowery meadow, and the words 'Home Sweet Home' written on the blocks.

Miss Honey is constantly bullied by **MISS TRUNCBULL**, the all-powerful headmistress of Crunchem Hall. Played by a man, she is an alarming figure who towers over everyone around her. Her outfit emphasises the massive torso and shoulders developed in her years as an Olympic-medal-winning hammer-thrower. She wears a long-sleeved brown smock of thick, stiff, oiled cotton, cinched in with a wide leather belt, and reaching to just above her knees. Under this is a white shirt and tight, knee-breeches of the same

material as the smock. Long, ribbed, wool socks with turn-over tops reach up to her bare knees. Her shoes are flat, brown leather brogues with fringed flaps over the laces. The costume for Miss Trunchbull is based on Roald Dahl's book *Matilda*, which is illustrated by Quentin Blake.

Miss Trunchbull's iron-grey hair is scraped back from her pale face into a tight bun. Her eyes are full of suspicion and her jutting chin seems to express her aggressive, obstinate personality. She has a whistle on a cord round her neck, which she blows to call order. For the PE class, she appears in a very short, pleated grey skirt and hooded sweatshirt with 'TRUNCH' on the back in large, white letters and lots of badges sewn onto both sleeves. Her Olympic medals are often hung round her neck.

The school uniforms at Crunchem Hall are grey flannel blazers worn with grey, knee-length shorts for the boys and grey dresses or skirts for the girls. All wear white shirts and striped grey and red school ties. The boys wear caps and the girls felt hats, and they carry brown leather satchels on their backs. *Matilda* and the other first years are neatly dressed, but the older children have changed their uniforms, shortening skirts and loosening ties.

*Matilda*'s best friend at school is **LAVENDER**, a lively little girl with a bright cheerful face and lots of initiative; and **NIGEL**, **AMANDA** and **BRUCE**, who all get into trouble with Miss Trunchbull. When they arrive at the school for the first time, its **gates** loom up in front of them.

Grey blocks make the high stone walls each side of the tall iron gates; the ironwork is made in a pattern of squares, and the pupils inside climb up it,

and stare out like monkeys in a zoo. The words Crunchem Hall, are chalked on a blackboard surface across the top of the gates, and red shields with the school crest hang either side.

For the **classroom** the wood squares in the stage rise up to become desks and seats with iron legs. The rows of seats face away from us, towards the wall-mounted blackboard at the back of the stage. In the **school gym** the wall bars are another pattern of squares. There is also a trampoline, a big thick gym mattress, and a vaulting horse, which is a square wooden box nearly as tall as the first year children, with a padded leather top.

The control centre of the school is Miss Trunchbull's **study**. Once again, the back of the study is a shaky pile of box shelves. The shelves are filled with rosettes, cups, ribbons and shields, all prizes from Miss Trunchbull's sporting career. Alongside them are shelves stacked with old-fashioned TV screens. One screen is showing old film of Miss Trunchbull's finest sporting moments. The others are CCTV, showing different parts of the school. Facing this wall of screens and prizes is a scruffy wooden writing table with iron legs, and a high backed wooden office chair, with its back to us. The table top is covered with heaps of papers, a heavy old-fashioned black dial telephone, a whisky bottle and a glass.

Mr. Wormwood has been selling his used cars to some Bulgarian businessmen. Their leader is **SERGEI**, a large man with a menacing manner who is taller and much broader than Mr. Wormwood. He wears a flashy black suit, shocking-pink shirt and a black overcoat, with matching pink lining, draped round his shoulders. His henchmen (including two



women) wear black suits with different coloured shirts, and the whole group wears dark glasses. Mr Wormwood's car lot has a couple of strands of tinsel stretched across it and is manned by a mechanic in grubby overalls, with a dozy expression.

Adult actors play the older children at Crunchem Hall, as well as parents, doctors, nurses, dancers and Sergei's Bulgarian henchmen.

#### [Track 4]

Written by **Dennis Kelly**, with music and lyrics by **Tim Minchin** and developed and directed by **Matthew Warchus**, the production is designed by **Rob Howell**, with choreography by **Peter Darling**, orchestrations, additional music and musical supervision by **Christopher Nightingale**, lighting by **Hugh Vanstone**, sound by **Simon Baker** and special effects and illusions by **Paul Kieve**.

That is the end of the introduction to *Matilda The Musical*. Occasionally, changes in set and costumes may occur as the run progresses. We will incorporate any changes into the live introduction, beginning fifteen minutes before the start of the show. To request audio introductions to future RSC productions, please call **01789 331275** or email [\*\*access@rsc.org.uk\*\*](mailto:access@rsc.org.uk) to receive them.