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The Wiz at Burning Coal: Kazowie! What a Show!

Posted by [Martha Keravuori and Chuck Galle+](#) • December 13th, 2015 • [Printer-friendly](#)



Carly Jones stars as Dorothy in *The Wiz* (photo by the Right Image Photography, Inc.)

A funny thing happened to us last weekend on our way to review [The Wiz](#), [Charlie Smalls](#) and [William F. Brown's](#) adaptation of [L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz](#), in [Burning Coal Theatre Company's Murphey School Auditorium](#), near the [Historic Oakwood Section](#) of Raleigh. Illness prevented us from going.

Several nights later, we picked it up on TV through On Demand and, frankly, had second thoughts about seeing it in real "live performance" here in Raleigh, because the TV show was pretty blah. But we had been assigned the gig, so we dropped on down Friday night.

Kazowie! What a show! The first and most noticeable difference throughout was the joy and energy of the actors who sang and danced themselves into our hearts and the hearts of the audience that night. We sat beside five young, well-behaved children whose delight radiated into the choreographed chaos that this cast created.

And "created" is the bang-on correct word for it, because this production, unlike the televised show, was entirely minimalist, enhanced by lighting designer [Joyce Liao](#). There is no set, essentially, except for a tri-part, white, almost translucent curtain; and there is a remarkable simplicity of costumes, thanks to [Kima Baffour](#). There are a few basic props and an overhead projector that takes on parts of the story telling and illuminates some scenes.

The cast consists of eight ragingly talented performers, all of whom play more than one role (and several play several roles). [Brittany Nicole Timmons](#) gets us off to a fine start as Aunt Em, with "The Feeling We Once Had." She goes on to double several times in dance numbers and eventually as

Glinda, the Good Witch of the South, doing outstanding work for this show. Dorothy is spunky and impish as presented by **Carly Jones**, whose magnificent voice is stirringly full bodied.



Demetrius Jackson stars as the Tin Man in *The Wiz* (photo by the Right Image Photography, Inc.)

Demetrius Jackson, as we have come to expect, was spectacular as Tin Man (keep an eye on those pecs), dancing the new robotic moves into his character's plight, and singing with an accomplished instrument. He also played guitar with musical director **Julie Florin's** small but powerful orchestra.

Scarecrow's brainless antics, and precarious gait, flopping and falling as if there were no bones in his body, were hilarious as brought to us by **Jamaal Anthony**, who also created a voice that came straight out of a pile of recently raked leaves.

Lion, the cowardly king of the jungle, obsessed with stroking his mane and proving his nonexistent courage by acting tough, is lovable and laughable as played by **Juan Isler**.

Emelia "Me-Me" Cowans-Taylor sets us on fire, singing "Don't Nobody Bring Me No Bad News," as Evilene, the Evil Witch of the West, backed up by the chorus of Winkies.





Emelia “Me-Me” Cowans-Taylor stars as Evilene in *The Wiz* (photo by the Right Image Photography, Inc.)

Tyanna West plays the high-strung Addaperle with loads of energy, which, in fact, can be said for the entire cast, as well. Her costume was well chosen to fit West’s interpretation of the role.

The Wiz himself is played by **Aaron Wright** with an abundance of joy and zest; and he doubles as his own green gate guard and plays other roles as well.

Director **Randolph Curtis Rand** has made superior use of the space, and given meaning to the concept of creative staging. Choreographer **Avis Hatcher-Puzzo** fills the set with motion and poetry — one wants to join the dancers, they have so much fun.

Casts tend to love their shows, but the joy and enthusiasm to be found in this performance is certainly notable — and Triangle theatergoers have only one more week to see it.

SECOND OPINION: Dec. 7th Raleigh, NC CVNC review by **Spencer P. Phillips**: <http://cvnc.org/article.cfm?articleId=7730>; Dec. 7th Raleigh, NC News & Observer review by **Roy C. Dicks**: <http://www.newsobserver.com/entertainment/arts-culture/article48450435.html>; and Dec. 2nd Durham, NC Indy Week mini-preview by **Brian Howe**: <http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/the-wiz/Event?oid=4809242>.

Burning Coal Theatre Company presents **THE WIZ** at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 17-19 and 2 p.m. Dec. 20 **Murphey School Auditorium**, 224 Polk St., Raleigh, North Carolina 27604, near the **Historic Oakwood Section**.

TICKETS: \$25 (\$15 students and active-duty military personnel and \$20 seniors), except \$5 Student Rush Tickets (sold at the door, 5 minutes before curtain), \$15 Thursdays, and \$15 per person for groups of 10 or more.

BOX OFFICE: 919-834-4001 or <http://www.etix.com/>.

SHOW: <http://burningcoal.org/the-wiz/> and <https://www.facebook.com/events/521820511309812/>.

PRESENTER: <http://www.burningcoal.org/>, <https://www.facebook.com/Burning.Coal.Theatre>, and <https://twitter.com/burningcoaltc>.

VENUE/DIRECTIONS: <http://burningcoal.org/murphey-school-auditorium/>.

OTHER LINKS:

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900 novel): <http://thewizardofoz.info/> (fan site by Eric P. Gjoavaag) and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wonderful_Wizard_of_Oz (Wikipedia).

Book: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collid=rbc3&fileName=rbc0001_2006gen32405page.db&recNum=0 (Library of Congress online facsimile edition).

L. Frank Baum (novelist, 1856-1919): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L. Frank Baum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L._Frank_Baum) (Wikipedia).

The Wizard of Oz (1939 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer musical-fantasy film):

<http://thewizardofoz.warnerbros.com/> (official website), <http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/852/The-Wizard-of-Oz/> (TCM Movie Database), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0032138/> (Internet Movie Database), and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The Wizard of Oz %281939 film%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wizard_of_Oz_%281939_film%29) (Wikipedia).

The Wiz (1974 Baltimore, 1975 Broadway, and 1984 West End musical): <http://www.ibdb.com/Show/View/9433> (Internet Broadway Database), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078504/> (Internet Movie Database), and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The Wiz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wiz) (Wikipedia).

Charlie Smalls (music and lyrics, 1943-87): <http://www.ibdb.com/Person/View/12421> (Internet Broadway Database), <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0806583/> (Internet Movie Database), and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie Smalls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Smalls) (Wikipedia).

William F. Brown (book): <http://www.ibdb.com/Person/View/9125> (Internet Broadway Database), <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0114912/> (Internet Movie Database), and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William F. Brown %28writer%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_F._Brown_%28writer%29) (Wikipedia).

Randolph Curtis Rand (Brooklyn, NY director): <http://www.broadwayworld.com/people/Randolph-Curtis-Rand/> (Broadwayworld.com bio) and <http://www.lortel.org> (Internet Off-Broadway Database), and <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1115038/> (Internet Movie Database).

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Martha Keravuori is a life-long theater artist — an actress, director, and stage manager — in North Carolina, around the country, and overseas. She has a theater degree from UNC-Greensboro, and has been active in the arts in Raleigh for the past 40 years. Martha is the retired executive director of the **North Carolina Theatre** Conference. **Chuck Galle** returned to Raleigh last year after a 17-year absence. He was active in community theater for many years, and directed the troupe of maximum-security inmates at Raleigh's Central Prison known as the Central Prison Players. In New England, he performed on stage, on TV, and in films. He is the author of **Stories I Never Told My Daughter — An Odyssey**, which can be ordered on his website: <http://www.chuckgalle.com/>. Chuck Galle and Martha Keravuori review theater for **Boom! Magazine** of Cary. Click [here](#) to read more of their reviews for **Boom! Magazine** and [here](#) to read more of their reviews for **Triangle Review** and **Triangle Arts and Entertainment**.

Summary

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