

2018 BEST MUSICAL AWARD NOMINEE



Henry Box Brown A Musical Journey – Edinburgh Festival Fringe – Assembly Rooms

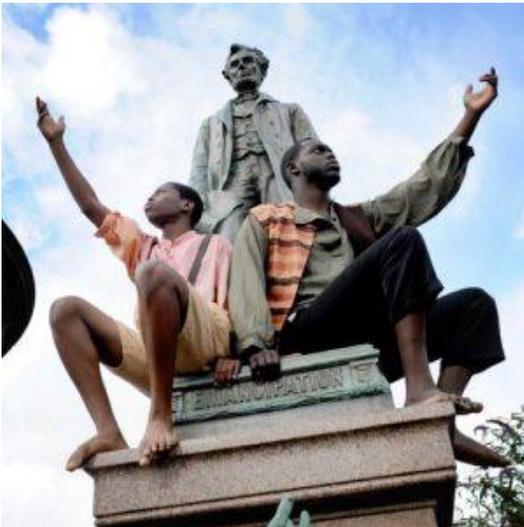
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by CLARE WALTERS - [Admin](#) on Sunday, 19 August, 2018 in [Edinburgh 2018](#), [Onstage](#), [Review](#)



Henry Box Brown A Musical Journey

at the Assembly Rooms until 25 August

Star rating: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

As Paul Gee who plays Henry says in his curtain speech, this piece is all about love. Despite the painful subject matter, the respect for the performers – for each other and this material – is palpable from the stage. The real Henry was born around 1815 and died in 1897 in Toronto, having also lived in the UK for 25 years.

Growing up a slave in Virginia, separated from his childhood family and then his adult family, Henry finally dares to escape his situation by risking his life. With the support of others, he mails himself nailed in a box out of

the south to a welcoming community in the north and – despite the box being stacked upside down for part of the trip – amazingly he survives.

To get to this point in the show we witness Henry taken from his loving family and put to work in a tobacco factory, his meeting and courting his wife Nancy and the birth of their children, the cruel separation of their family as Nancy and their children are sold, and finally someone white speaking out that this is wrong, the Reverend Smith played by Matt Peterson. The music, by **Mehr Mansuri and Frank Sanchez**, is **full of life and beautifully sung by the whole company**. It has mostly original but also some very familiar music including gospel, R&B and bluegrass, plus a cappella spirituals. The staging by Tony Award winner Ben Harney is bright and spacious, using the full extent of the Music Hall, and re-creates both the slave market and the actual box Henry travels in. The company is fully employed as both ensemble and storytellers.

This show was originally created for the Children's Theatre Company in New York and is gradually gaining momentum. Long may this continue.

Clare Walters