

## Lucy Tobin on In The Night Garden Live

*In The Night Garden* is probably the only lullaby-filled children's TV programme that has almost cause a parental riot. Why? Because when CBeebies once moved the tots' favourite - featuring the adventures of Igglepiggle, Upsy Daisy, Makka Pakka and friends - from its bedtime slot to an earlier one, it prompted parent petitions, outrage, and a swift u-turn from the BBC.

Igglepiggle and co returned to their popular evening slot, and they've remained there ever since: *In the Night Garden* is the BAFTA award-winning series that's been one of the Beeb's most-watched shows for a whopping 12 years. Only 100 episodes were ever made - so toddlers and their parents around the country will be elated that, following 2010's sell-out live touring show, *In the Night Garden Live* is coming to NAME OF VENUE with a brand-new show and a brilliant new story to tell on DATES.

It's part of a tour of 40 regional theatres which promises to thrill toddlers and their parents or grandparents: there's a reason celebrities including singers Adele and Robbie Williams, Rio Ferdinand, Billie Piper, Scott Mills and Amanda Holden are amongst those who have flocked to see *In the Night Garden Live*.

But it's the puppets on stage who are the stars of this show. Whilst the average grown-up might watch *In the Night Garden* and see a strange plot of cuddly characters apparently speaking gobbledegook to a soporific backdrop, it's all sophisticatedly-tailored linguistics to captivate pre-schoolers. Andrew Davenport, the show's creator, explains: "The characters speak almost entirely in play language, which is hugely important to language development. Children recognise the nursery rhyme silliness of it, they love the funny language and characters, and the attention to detail that's within them, and they love the whole fantasy of the Night Garden world - but I think, at the end of it, that it's the comedy that draws them in."

It might be all about having fun, but the makers of *In the Night Garden Live* took the responsibility of putting on what will be a lot of the audience's first trip to a theatre very seriously. As Oliver Seadon, producer of *In the Night Garden Live*, puts it: "It's such a heart-meltingly brilliant thing to hear the hysteria when Igglepiggle first appears on stage in front of his little fans - there's a sort of glow of happiness throughout the theatre. In their minds he exists - he's real - and they're all so excited to see him."

"Making shows for two-year-olds is brilliant - they're so vocal when you get it right (and when you get it wrong). My favourite ever clip that one parent shared on social media after seeing *In the Night Garden Live* had her two year old repeating over and over 'Mummy, it's amazing. Wow, it's amazing. It's amazing.' I think she says it around fifteen times! As a theatre producer you can't really wish for a better review than that."

To guarantee that reaction with the latest show, the producers called in world-renowned theatrical experts to create the show, which is written by *Bing Live* writer Helen Eastman, with the puppets' costumes designed by Tahra Zafar. A costumier, puppet and animatronics expert whose career spans the blockbuster *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* films, Zafar even worked with the Queen on her first (and only) acting role, as she was head of costumes at the 2012 London Olympics and Elizabeth II starred in the Opening Ceremony. Yet ask the creative

whiz what character she's most proud of working on in her three-decade-long career, and the answer isn't Hermione or Obi Wan-Kenobe - it's Upsy Daisy.

The always-happy dolly with red, pink and yellow hair who Zafar helped create for the original *In the Night Garden* TV show is, she explains, "just smashing. She's a girl character who avoids the usual stereotypes - she isn't overly bossy, or stuffed with props".

Working on Upsy Daisy was Zafar's first job after maternity leave with her now 14-year-old - "so the character is a bit like my other daughter," she laughs. The designer is passionate about the importance of children's theatre under the shadow of cuts to the arts in schools. "Straitened budgets and a 1950s-style emphasis only on reading, writing and arithmetic means that creativity is being sucked out of schools," she believes. "So it's more important for us on *In the Night Garden Live*, and in children's arts in general, to make sure we do our jobs really well. We have a responsibility to get everything to right to fill that gap. Children's theatre is about being together, taking in a shared experience, escaping everyday worries, being taken somewhere different."

That somewhere different is Igglepiggle's Busy Day, as *In the Night Garden Live* tells the tale of Igglepiggle's search for his friends, following their funny sounds until he finds them all. Fans will spot all of their favourites. Zafar has spent months working on the design of the characters "because, to the children in our audience, *In the Night Garden's* characters are like friends that they know really well: they have to look exactly as they do on their screens at home." And the show's writer, Eastman says her biggest challenge was "creat[ing] something which will feel completely familiar to our young audience, who know the world of Night Garden and its characters intimately, but is also fresh and exciting. All our favourite characters feature in the story, as do the rituals of the Night Garden."

That sense of responsibility is echoed by Will Tuckett, the Royal Ballet stalwart, Olivier award-winner, and one of the Royal Opera House's top choreographers, who is director of the new *In the Night Garden Live* stage show. "It's not just the actual show that we want to be perfect for our young audience, but the whole theatre experience," Tuckett explains. "We've trained all the front-of-house staff to make sure everything runs smoothly - after all, it's not every show that sees hundreds of buggies arrive! We needed to make it clear that we can't delay the start as other shows might because of a glitch, for example, because parents may have to pick up older kids at a set time. We're making sure the show works for parents as well as their children."

Tuckett's favourite thing about *In the Night Garden Live* is that "its style is perennial - a make-believe world, all about how friends operate, how small children play, how they learn about texture, communication - it's very relaxing to watch. Parents might initially think it all looks a bit weird - but kids absolutely love it, and parents love watching their kids love something."

Like the rest of the *In the Night Garden Live* crew, Tuckett knows he has "a really precious audience for Night Garden. For so many this will be their first time in a theatre; we want the families to go back to see something else, for the theatre to feel like a place they all enjoy going to, to see magical shows. It's a big responsibility."