



## Wicked

Julian Sheppard

### Warnings to a media-led society

Wicked

**Composer:** Stephen Schwartz

**Duration:** 170 minutes

**Location:** Apollo Victoria Theatre, London

The title and witch-themed publicity made me a little unsure about whether a Christian should be joining the crowds flocking to this musical. Was this going to be a celebration of the ghoulish? Or maybe a portrayal of evil as good – as confusing as the slang use of ‘wicked’ to mean excellent?

Wizardry and a green witch do feature in this fantasy prequel to *The Wizard of Oz*. But it is no more ghoulish than the well-known film. I appreciated the clever way it makes sense of the strange things in Oz. There is plenty of singing, dancing and humour to entertain. However, it is a deeper story, exploring issues of image, goodness, oppression, selfish and selfless love.

The goodies care about and stand up for the disadvantaged, abused and oppressed. The audience can't help booing the baddies. And when a hero saves his friend, allowing himself to be carried away to be punished and casting a crucifix shaped silhouette on the backcloth, some will be reminded of our true hero.

### Twist in the plot

I don't want to spoil it for you. But the twist in the plot is that the goodies and the baddies are not the ones you first assume. The revelation of this

provides the serious messages of the story: do not judge by appearances and do not assume that the common opinion about a person or group of people is a correct assessment.

This show gives much needed warnings to our image-conscious, celebrity-obsessed, media-led society: admiration and adoration are so often given without knowledge of true character. We can easily be manipulated into unjustified hatred of others. And popularity – the goal that many strive for – is not everything.

Stephen Schwartz, the composer, has provided contemporary music with complex orchestration. The two leading ladies deliver their challenging singing parts with power. The stage sets, costumes, lighting and effects do not disappoint. Suitable for all but the most easily-frightened children. Recommended.

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**Guildford**

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