

Review

The Brain

Bristol New Vic

Morning Star

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Simon Parsons

With a blend of Mervin Peake's gothic shadows and Tommy Cooper's surreal humour, the Forkbeard Fantasy company take us on an educational tour through time and mind.

Along the route to the hypothalamus, Dr Bucephalus Grimes (Chris Britton) encounters a range of fictional and historic characters to assist him in his journey to discovery – Little Red Riding Hood in the forests of the brain structure, Marcel Proust very near the centre.

The set, an unzippable container representing the brain, is a box of visual tricks. Within this framework the company interact with film footage and lighting effects accompanied by live and recorded music to create a dynamic multi-media performance.

Writer and director Paul B Davies, has played to the company's well-tested strengths of the last 25 years. A full range of weird and wonderful characters explore the science and mystery of the brain in an episodic manner.

At times, this approach leads to weaknesses in the dramatic structure with scenes and effects seeming to appear for little more than their own sake, but such criticisms of self-indulgence are of minor importance in an amusing and fantastical journey.

This show, one of the most ambitious of their projects, will culminate next September, after an exhaustive tour of Britain, at The Natural History Museum in Kensington as both an interactive exhibit and a performance.

Meanwhile, it is playing December 9 to 11 at The Gantry, Southampton; January 28 at Queens Hall, Narbeth; January 30 at Arts Centre, Aberystwyth; February 3 to 5 at New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth.

