

BambinO



VENUE: **The Edinburgh Academy**
 TIME: **times vary, 8–20 Aug, not 14**
 TICKETS: **FREE**

I haven't seen this many baldies at the opera since... well, the last time I went to the opera. The audience at *BambinO*, however, are considerably younger than your standard follicly-challenged opera crowd. 6-18 months-old, in fact, because this is something rather special: a contemporary opera created with babies in mind.

BambinO, a collaboration between Scottish Opera, the Manchester International Festival and theatre company Improbable, tells the story of a bird, Uccellina (Charlotte Hoather), who finds an egg and raises the chick that hatches from it, Pulcino (Timothy Connor), as her own, before bidding



Credit: James Glossop

him farewell when it's time for him to leave the nest. Liam Paterson's libretto blends bird noises with a few choice words in Italian, but the storytelling is primarily a visual affair, director Phelim McDermott revealing a real understanding of what babies need in live performance.

The piece is staged almost in the round, and with crawling babes welcome to explore the playing space, *BambinO* has an almost interactive quality to it. Hoather and Connor are unfazed by the ongoing infantile stage invasion, directly engaging with audience members keen to hit,

dribble on and roll around Giuseppe Belli and Emma Belli's sparse, cushion-covered set. This level of interaction is no mean feat considering the complexity of Paterson's music – this may be an opera for babies but there's nothing childish about what Paterson has achieved here. With often abstract vocal lines maintaining a lively conversation with atmospheric instrumental accompaniment from cellist Laura Sergeant and percussionist Stuart Semple, *BambinO* is a delight not just for its intended audience, but for their grown-ups too. Small, yes, but perfectly formed. ➔ [Jo Caird](#)

The Tales of Peter Rabbit and Jemima Puddleduck



VENUE: **Underbelly's Circus Hub on the Meadows**
 TIME: **12:00pm – 1:00pm, 5–26 Aug, not 14**
 TICKETS: **£11 – £12**

By pairing Beatrix Potter's beloved stories with music, this show aims to bring something new to these sweet tales of mild adventuring. "Who here knows Peter Rabbit?" asks a rather tired-sounding producer at the beginning of the show; the muted reaction of the audience suggests that perhaps

they are a little tired, too, but when the musicians are introduced on stage and narrator/soprano Michelle Todd appears, things pick up considerably.

An unusual chamber ensemble of violin, cello, guitar, flute, clarinet and percussion play a delightful score by composer Stephen McNeff which perfectly complements these traditional but playful tales. It's refreshing to hear an ensemble of this size and quality performing in a Fringe kids show, and the producers should be applauded for allowing children to experience real instruments up close. There is clearly a gentle educational mission here, and a mid-show demonstration of each instrument encourages kids to listen out for their unique qualities

in the next section, which is very effective.

Michelle Todd is an excellent storyteller, never letting her lovely soprano voice get in the way of the storytelling; so although much of the story is sung, it is always clear and comprehensible. Some light use of props is a nice touch, but it's a shame that the presentation of this show doesn't have the same imagination which went into the score; it's a little static, and it feels as though something is missing.

Still, the fact that despite this, both children and adults remain enchanted throughout is testament to the skill of the performers. This show may lack a little flair, but it is gentle, sweet and nostalgic, just like the stories that it's based on.

➔ [Joel Leaver](#)