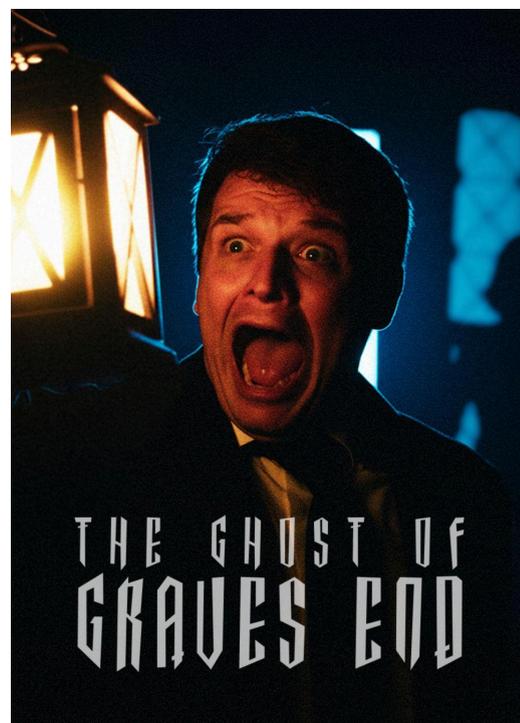


THEATRE REVIEW: The Ghost of Graves End – Peccadillo Theatre Co. Story House Chester.

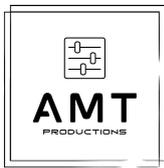
There is something wonderfully satisfying about a piece of theatre that can make you jump out of your seat one moment and laugh out loud the next. Peccadillo Theatre Company's *The Ghost of Graves End*, written by Robert Farquhar and directed by Lucy Thatcher, achieves this balance with remarkable confidence. This spooky Victorian comedy, inspired by classic ghost stories such as *The Turn of the Screw*, has its tongue firmly in its cheek while still delivering genuine moments of tension and fear. It is, in the best possible way, *The Woman in Black* meets the high-energy silliness of *The 39 Steps*.



The story follows Charles, a penniless poet who reluctantly accepts a position as tutor to a peculiar orphan boy in a maze-like, neo-gothic country house perpetually shrouded in mist. The previous tutor left suddenly, and nobody seems willing to explain why. As strange dreams, unexplained sounds, and increasingly sinister events begin to unfold, Charles must decide whether to stay and face the growing terror, or leave before it is too late.

Farquhar's writing shows a strong understanding of theatrical form and audience engagement. The script plays knowingly with the conventions of Victorian ghost stories, blending self-awareness and humour without undermining the tension. Its structure feels carefully shaped, guiding the audience through suspense, absurdity, and emotional connection, while recurring motifs reward attention and build rhythm. The result is writing that feels intelligent, accessible, and theatrically assured.





Greg Jones, who plays Charles, gave a strong and consistent performance, anchoring the production with clarity and energy. Remaining on stage for much of the performance, he sustained impressive focus throughout. His expressive reactions and excellent comedic timing supported the work of his fellow performers beautifully, often elevating scenes simply through subtle facial expressions and physical responses.

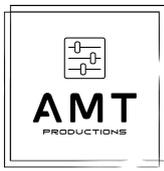
One of the most striking elements of this production was its inventive use of physical theatre. The cast created the busy streets of London by continually crossing paths with suitcases, bumping into one another and weaving through the space. This sequence became a dynamic visual spectacle, particularly effective at the train station, before abruptly stopping when Charles discovered the child's doll with its chilling "buttons for eyes". This repeated line became a brilliant running motif, unsettling and hilarious in equal measure. The audience response grew stronger each time it returned.

The effectiveness of these group sequences was due in large part to the cast's versatility. With only six performers, the multi-rolling felt clear, purposeful, and imaginative. Transitions between characters were clean, vocally distinct, and physically well-defined, keeping the storytelling easy to follow while showcasing impressive adaptability across the cast.

A standout comic presence throughout the production was Tim Lynskey, who multi-rolled across numerous characters including Author, Master, Mr Doubry, Taxi Driver and Priest. Each character was clearly defined through voice, physicality, and energy, demonstrating exceptional versatility and control. His expressive face, particularly his wide-eyed reactions, and sharp comic instinct meant that his entrances alone often generated laughter, showing the strong rapport he built with the audience.



The cart scene was a particular highlight. Using only two chairs and coconut shells, Lynskey's full physical commitment; bouncing, leaning, and muttering with precision, helped create a moment of pure theatrical comedy. Although many of his roles were technically small, his impact on stage was consistently significant. His confidence, creativity, and stage presence ensured that each appearance was memorable, and his performance stood out as one of the strongest elements of an already impressive cast.



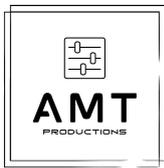
The minimal set designed by Shannon Lancashire consisted of versatile items such as a door frame, picture frame, bench, chairs and table. Each was used inventively, including moments where illuminated frames were held by cast members to become portraits and corridors within the vast house. This creative simplicity encouraged the audience's imagination and allowed the action to flow smoothly without unnecessary interruption.

Lighting and sound design by Laurence Noble were integral to the success of this production and functioned as powerful storytelling tools rather than simply technical support. The stage lighting in particular felt like an art form in itself, shaping mood, guiding the audience's focus, and deepening the emotional impact of each scene. Subtle shifts in colour, intensity, and placement established locations, created tension, and supported the narrative without ever feeling distracting. Sudden lighting changes effectively marked moments such as doors slamming, while side lighting created the illusion of corridors, and blackouts were used to shock and unsettle the audience.

The funeral scene was especially striking. As the dark figure appeared at the back of the space, the stylised lighting created a genuinely chilling image that lingered in the mind. Sophie Jones, who embodied this frightening figure, created real tension through controlled physicality and intense stage presence. Jones' controlled stillness in this moment, combined with the lighting choice, generated real unease in the audience. In contrast, her portrayal of Miss Widget was clearly characterised and engaging, demonstrating strong vocal and physical variation. Her narrator moments were delivered with clarity and confidence, guiding the audience through the story with ease.

The final sequence was visually and emotionally powerful. A predominantly red wash heightened the tension, while the cast moved rapidly between blackout and tightly focused spotlights during the struggle to save young William. The speed and precision required for these transitions were impressive, and the sharp contrast in lighting heightened the urgency and chaos of the scene. The cast's ability to hit every light cue so accurately demonstrated strong rehearsal discipline, clear direction and the complexity of the lighting design.





Georgia Chadwick, a returning cast member in the production, delivered a dual performance as Dotty and young William that was consistently compelling and skilfully executed. Taking on such contrasting roles requires immense technical control, emotional intelligence, and discipline, all of which she demonstrated consistently throughout. As Dotty, she conveyed privilege and ambition through upright posture, confident physicality, and sharp vocal delivery, while allowing subtle glimpses of vulnerability beneath the surface. Her portrayal of William, however, was deeply moving, with softened movement, emotional openness, and a fragile physicality created a believable and touching child.



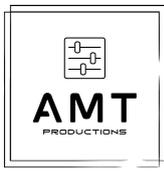
Her attention to detail was exceptional. The possession scene, including the prolonged eye flicker where only the whites of her eyes were visible, was hauntingly effective and left a lasting impression. The Shakespeare recitation scene was another standout, in which she convincingly portrayed a character who was themselves performing, a layered and intelligent piece of acting. Beyond her principal roles, Chadwick also contributed strongly to the production, transitioning seamlessly between narrator and character work. Her consistency, commitment, and depth of skill made her an invaluable presence within the company. It is clear from this performance that she is a highly capable actor with a strong theatrical instinct.

Sound design was used intelligently throughout. Carefully placed effects built tension and enhanced atmosphere, while the use of pre-recorded voices of the cast supported multi-rolling and added realism. Moments of silence were used just as effectively, making sudden sounds more impactful and keeping the audience in a constant state of anticipation.



Sian Weedon's performance as Mrs Doubry was a comic highlight throughout the production. As another returning cast member, she brought confidence, depth, and assurance to the role, delivering a performance that consistently elevated the scenes she was in. Her bold character choices and sharp timing brought to mind the brilliance of Catherine Tate, with fearless commitment to the comedy and an instinctive understanding of rhythm.

Through hunched posture, distinctive movement, and strong vocal characterisation, she created a character that was vivid, believable, and endlessly entertaining. Importantly, alongside the humour she also brought emotional depth, ensuring Mrs Doubry was not just hilariously doolally but genuinely compelling. Her performance added richness to the production and left a lasting impression.



Alex McGonagle also demonstrated strong versatility in his roles as the flirty Waiter and clueless Doctor. Each character was clearly differentiated through physicality and voice, and his narrator moments were delivered with assurance, contributing to the clarity and rhythm of the storytelling.

Lucy Thatcher's direction held the entire production together with clarity, imagination, and confidence. Her vision for the piece was evident throughout, particularly in the strong use of physical theatre and the inventive staging that allowed a minimal set and small cast to create such a rich and fully realised world. The production was fast-paced yet never confusing; every transition felt purposeful, and the storytelling remained clear despite the complexity of the multi-rolling and narrator structure.

Transitions between scenes were slick and clean, maintaining momentum and rhythm throughout. The staging made excellent use of the space, with performers constantly reconfiguring the environment through movement rather than relying on set changes. This not only showcased the cast's versatility but also demonstrated a strong directorial understanding of how to keep the audience visually engaged.

A particularly effective sequence took place in the Doubry household, where Charles attempts to uncover the truth about the ghost but is continually interrupted by visitors arriving for drinks. The repetition of "chin chin", "bottoms up" and "have it" became increasingly absurd and was staged with precision and excellent comic timing. What could have been a simple gag was elevated into a fully realised comic sequence through strong direction and careful control of pace.

Most impressively, Thatcher managed the delicate balance between horror and comedy with real skill. Moments of tension were allowed to breathe, creating genuine suspense, before being released with carefully timed humour. This balance kept the audience emotionally engaged throughout and demonstrated a clear, confident directorial vision. The result was a production that felt imaginative, cohesive, and expertly shaped from beginning to end.

Overall, *The Ghost of Graves End* is an imaginative, tightly performed and highly engaging piece of theatre. Through inventive direction, strong ensemble work, effective technical design and excellent use of physical theatre, Peccadillo Theatre Company have created a production that keeps audiences on edge while delivering consistent laughter. This was my second time seeing the show, and it was just as enjoyable and impactful as the first. A memorable and assured piece of storytelling that I would highly recommend.

Reviewer: Abigail Bradbury - AMT Productions

Date: 24.01.26

If you want to see *The Ghost of Graves End* at the Unity Theatre Liverpool Please follow the link below to book your tickets.

<https://www.unitytheatreliverpool.co.uk/whats-on/the-ghost-of-graves-end/>