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## Dance: Pinocchio at the Theatre Royal, Winchester

Simple yet elaborate, stark but magical, this family-friendly adaptation is a pretty impressive achievement, but it may not suit pre-schoolers

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★★★★☆

This family-friendly adaptation of Carlo Collodi's 19th-century moral fable about a puppet's picaresque journey towards human boyhood is full of memorable, dance-enhanced imagery. It was conceived, directed and choreographed by Jasmin Vardimon, an associate artist at Sadler's Wells, where the production can soon be seen as part of a UK tour. She also co-designed it and created the soundtrack. Simple yet elaborate, stark but magical, *Pinocchio* is a pretty impressive achievement.

Here *Pinocchio's* conscience, embodied by a cricket in Disney's 1940 classic film, mainly serves as an occasional narrator whose (male) voiceover accompanies the mercurial motions of several pairs of glow-in-the-dark, white-gloved hands that shape-shift into eyes and a mouth. This magnetically clever device is a mark of the production's economical ingenuity. The set is suspended on ropes, allowing for fairly quick, smooth scene changes. Members of the eight-strong cast are also at times raised and lowered like so. As Vardimon has commented, the show is in many respects living marionette theatre.

*Pinocchio's* creation is deftly staged in silhouette. Emerging from a womb-like tent, he stumbles about like a tot taking its first steps. The remarkably limber Maria Dougeri plays the part as a coltish, blank-faced innocent all too susceptible to the bad influence of Estéban Lecoq and Uros Petronijevic's equally slinky Cat and Fox.

Vardimon's dark, dreamy work may not suit pre-schoolers. (The company suggest audiences age seven and older.) Choreographically it can be too busy, while some low-rolling, floor-based ensemble dances are heavy-handed and repetitive. Still, Vardimon and her tireless cast make strong, smart use of their expressive appendages to form, say, one long chain of arms, multiple hands to convey the effect of *Pinocchio's* lies on his nose, and even two pairs of feet out on a date. Overall the show has a physical flow and a sustained narrative and thematic pull that holds attention for close to 90 minutes.

**Touring to December 18;** [jasminvardimon.com](http://jasminvardimon.com)