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### **“The Wiz” is a flashy feel-good musical**

by Wim Vervoort

**Place:** Beatrix Theatre, Utrecht. **Event:** premiere of the musical “The Wiz” by Charlie Smalls (music) and William F. Brown (script) in a translation by Martine Bijl. **With:** Nurlaila Karim, Danny de Munk, Jerrel Houtsnee, Danny Yanga, Jeroen Phaff, Marjolijn Touw, Sophia Wezer, Mathilde Santing. **Directed by:** Glenn Casale. **Musical director:** Jeroen Sleyfer. **Choreography:** Anthony van Laast. **Costumes:** Miquel Angel Huldor. **Still showing:** every day but Monday.

**UTRECHT** - “Deep in yourself you will find the way to who you truly want to be, believe in yourself,” sings Mathilde Santing, filled with conviction, in the one song that she sings as the good witch Glinda, toward the end of the musical “The Wiz”. It contains the message of the journey that Dorothy and her friends, the Scarecrow (without brains), the Tin Man (without a heart) and the Cowardly Lion (without courage) have taken through the Land of Oz.

But you don’t actually have to seek deeper meaning in that message, because “The Wiz” is first and foremost a feel-good musical, in which the senses of sight and sound are fully indulged and the moral of this famous fairytale can be picked up between the acts if desired. The Land of Oz, where Dorothy lands after a storm that was cleverly depicted on stage, looks like it came from the pages of a fairytale. That applies both to the imaginative sets and all those different colourful costumes.

In her simple dress from the land of man, Dorothy actually stands out. The only unusual thing about her is the glittering shoes that she receives from the good witch Abacadabra, which hold the secret of her return to Kansas.

With her new friends, she travels along the Yellow Brick Road to the Wiz, who lives in the Emerald City. The arrival of the wizard (Danny de Munk in rare form) on an enormous eye is spectacular, although things briefly went wrong during the premiere when the eye showed not dramatic images, but the Microsoft logo. Very good of Tin Man Jerrel Houtsnee to keep singing unflappably, while the hall laughed about what was happening behind his back.

Musically, “The Wiz” is rock-solid. Choreographer Van Laast translated the blend of soul, rock and gospel into several exciting dance numbers, with highlights naturally including the hits “Ease down the road” and “A brand new day”. Nurlaila Karim makes a fine Dorothy, and Marjolein [sic] Touw turned her brief appearance as the evil witch Sadista (“Don’t nobody bring me no bad news”) into a great comic number, although her sudden watery demise is not depicted very strongly in theatrical terms.

The show is high-paced, so the unnecessary song that the Cowardly Lion sings in the poppy field can be left out. Towards the end, the theatre-makers slow things down, so Santing’s “Believe in yourself” and Dorothy’s “Home” receive their full musical dues. The spectacle returns in the encore.

In my circles, “The Wiz” was described as “flashy”. That seemed like an adequate way to describe this contemporary translation of a fairytale. **The brilliant lighting plan by Thomas Hase, renowned in the American and German opera world, deserves special note.**