



Dear diary: Benjamin Lewis (Adrian) and Amir Wilson (Nigel) in *Adrian Mole*

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole: The Musical
Menier Chocolate Factory, London SE1 ★★★

“Pandora! I adore ya. I implore ye. Don’t ignore me.” Thus, plaintively, did the pustular hero apostrophise his bossy, bosomy classmate Pandora Braithwaite in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, Aged 13 ^¾. One of the strengths of Luke Sheppard’s puppyish musical adaptation of Sue Townsend’s classic novel about the agony of growing up in Leicester in the 1980s is that it preserves several of Adrian’s touchingly terrible poems. Another is the cast’s chutzpah. In the one I saw, Ilan Galkoff was a confidently unconfident protagonist, but the women were the standouts: Gay Soper as Grandma Mole, obsessed with the royal wedding; Kelly Price as Pauline, the dissatisfied mum poring over her gravy-stained copy of *The Female Eunuch*; and Georgia Pemberton, effortlessly commanding attention as Pandora. They sing better, too, bringing to life the fun but largely forgettable songs. The problem with what is otherwise a thoroughly entertaining evening is that Townsend’s book is essentially a work of literary irony. By its nature, the musical belts out its secrets, with jazz hands and jolly dance routines. That’s a bit of a clash.