

Creative energy

THEATRE

What makes a good scientist? You have to be organized and methodological like Annabella, one of two students who are sent to an old, dusty lab for one more chance to pass their exams. But is that enough? Not at all, it seems. Phil's willingness to explore,

think creatively and test boundaries is just as important in their quest to devise a presentation that explains all nine forms of energy in five minutes. Ironically, much is made of the fact that Annabella is Scottish and Phil is English. Does this amount to unexpected support from the Science Museum's *The Energy Show* that was recently on tour in the UK for the 'better together' side in the campaign for Scottish Independence?

To demonstrate the likes of chemical, electrical and kinetic energy, methane bubbles are set on fire, hydrogen balloons explode and static electricity has a hair-raising effect on the silent, robotic lab assistant called Bernard. Virtual lab assistant i-nstein's batteries are recharged with the help of a bicycle so that he can continue with his cartoon-style scientific commentary that provides background information on the different forms of energy. But the most important form of energy is of course 'The Force' and Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader — aka Phil and Annabella — fight it out with plasma-ball-charged (fluorescent tube) light sabres.

Phil is brilliantly comical with her constant attacks on Annabella's character traits and the audience squeals with laughter and is very much on her side when she suggests that they "just blow things up". Annabella's obsession with making lists rather than taking action provides a great, if sometimes overly hysterical counterpart. i-nstein's explanations are reasonably clear, but possibly too much material is covered and at too fast a pace for everything to be taken in by the audience.

So did the students pass their test in the end? The decision is left to the audience by measuring the sound energy they can produce in support of the pair. The result is an absolutely ear-splitting noise and Phil and Annabella pass with flying colours! But does the show inspire children to become scientists or actors? I put that question



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to my eight-year-old daughter, who promptly replied, "A scientist, so I can blow things up".

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