

DUET FOR ONE
By
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THE WAREHOUSE THEATRE

April 2nd 2014

I very much enjoyed this play and the intensity of the situation and the emotions. Based on the tragic situation of Jacqueline Du Pre and Daniel Barenboim it explores the obsessive passion that true musicians have and the truth that without music the rest of life becomes meaningless. It is a real challenge for the actors as there is nowhere to hide and there is no support except for each other. However the challenge was met with strength and it was a great night out at the theatre. Other societies can only envy the Warehouse for being able to afford to go out of the popular canon upon occasion and stage such great drama.

PRESENTATION

With a single set with very little dressing or change in lighting or sound it is important to set the atmosphere at once and this was done well. The starkness of the office and the simplicity of the set put the onus on to the performers and these were right for this play as the focus has to be on the emotional journey. Dave Goodall dressed the set well with the imposing desk, and the stereo equipment behind was just large enough to keep reminding us of what the artist has lost. Lighting and sound were just right – the lighting subdued enough to give the intimacy of the situation and the slightly raised volume of the music added poignancy to the situation – so well done to Brian Perkins. Props were few but appropriate. The costumes were also convincing – Dr Feldmann looked every inch the professional at all times and the changing neck ties cleverly indicated the passage of time between appointments. Stephanie's dressing was interesting as she went from a certain glamour through a messier stage and then back to her first costume and this gave us a guide to her journey so well done Dave and Teresa. Overall a good presentation. And the Batricar was perfect.

PRODUCTION

Robert Graydon is always a safe pair of hands when directing and he clearly had a tight grip on the reins and with two such solid actors I doubt he had a hard time on this one. The lack of business and the emphasis on the verbal interaction really showed the intensity of the situation. The use of the Batricar was well handled by Stephanie and its sudden movements in the office at moments of tension were well timed and contrasted well with the measured movements of Dr Feldmann.

I think where Robert really scored was in the pacing of the play and the contrast of the stillness of Doctor Feldmann and the artificial speed of Stephanie. There were occasions when the acting could have been overdone but Robert kept his actors on a tight rein relying on nuance rather than exaggeration of the emotions on stage and we had a real feel of the characters behaving naturally in what was a very unnatural situation. The tension was kept throughout and, in spite of the inevitability of Stephanie's situation, the audience clearly wanted things to change and improve, which of course with Stephanie's ultimate acceptance of the inevitable situation they did in a way. The poignancy at the end when Stephanie and the audience both accept the inevitable was really moving. I don't think this team missed a trick in wringing out every feeling in this sad situation and the audience were thoroughly engaged. Well done.

ACTING

DAVE GOODALL – DR FELDMANN

This was a strong performance and Dave kept it well under control. He maintained his accent throughout and certainly managed to portray the Doctor's determination to show his patient that the only way to live with her loss is to face her agony and accept the horrible truth that she has lost forever what she loves the most. Doctors in this situation say little and the line load for the doctor was much less heavy than for the patient but Dave managed to convey the music-loving Doctor's empathy with his patient's situation and his need to encourage her to want to live on. When he lost his temper in session 5 to force her to stop pretending the audience sat up - it was a real moment of theatre at its best – wonderful writing put across really well to the audience and Dave certainly had the ability to put life into the situation where there was little action only the spoken word. This was a very demanding role with a very convincing performance. Thank you.

TERESA RAVENSCROFT – STEPHANIE ABRAHAMS

This massive role demands a huge amount from the actor and Teresa rose to the occasion. In spite of an enormous line load she only faltered once near the very beginning of the play and as soon as she got her pace she was unstoppable. It is the mood swings from one moment to the next that make this role so demanding and it is necessary for the actor to convey every level of hope and despair, raging anger and devastating sorrow as well as keeping up the pretence that Stephanie can deal with the situation. Teresa clearly understood every word and saw the nuances that Kempinski is trying to put across. She also had to deal with the mobility chair – no mean feat in itself, and it handled convincingly most of the time. I think the most impressive scene was when she was pushing Feldmann to the edge with her description of the mindless sex with the totter which she was using to convince herself that she still could live, when all the purpose of and meaning to her life was gone. I think that particular scene between Dave and Teresa was extremely well done and very powerful. We were left caring about Stephanie in the end

in spite of her behaviours because both actors made us feel the pathos of this woman dying in such circumstances after such a blazing life. Congratulations to you both.

CONCLUSION

This was a very demanding play and was well done by all concerned. It deserved a far bigger audience than were present on opening night and I hope word got round about how good it was. Thank you for a great night at the theatre.

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