



Society : Cygnet Players
Production : Spring Awakening
Date : Saturday, July 13th 2019
Venue : Stockwell Playhouse
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

Once again it was a pleasure to have visited Cygnet Players and this time enjoy their production of ‘Spring Awakening’. Many thanks to Adam Walker-Galbraith for arranging my ticket to this often troubling but thought-provoking and entertaining show.

Spring Awakening challenges the sexually oppressive attitudes of the 19th century and includes some pretty uncomfortable topics for a theatre audience to watch. Based on Frank Wedekind’s play, this musical version was written by Duncan Sheik with lyrics by Steven Sater.

Focused on a group of German teenagers, this is a serious piece of work with some compelling messages. Set in the 1890s, the issues faced by the schoolchildren remain worryingly relevant and holds a powerful message for today’s audiences.

Cygnet Players is to be applauded for expanding their production schedule to include this smaller fourth production in 2019. The society is also to be recognised for tackling lesser-known shows and such challenging material. This production clearly demonstrated that amateur dramatics is alive and well within Cygnet Players. Having said that, this was a brave selection - artistically it was a good choice and there was certainly no doubting the sincerity and passion of the cast.

Aimee Parnell is to be congratulated as Director for this wonderful piece of theatre. Working closely with Rachel Kennedy and Sian Marr (Assistant Directors) together with Hannah Umlandt (Producer) and Rosie Smith (Assistant Producer) this was a challenging production that required thoughtful staging and direction. Careful attention was made in selection a young and quality cast to accurately portray schoolchildren. This was crucial and handled well resulting in the cast being believable. Attention to detail was precise, the movement of props during the musical numbers was effortless and the overall pace was terrific.

Harriet Oughton (Musical Director) and her small band were unfortunately situation out of sight behind the stage. Whilst this was necessary due to lack of space, it had no negative impact on the music or singing. Indeed, the vocals and music blended well together, the volume level was perfect throughout and the timing ‘spot on’. The cast had clearly been well-rehearsed ensuring clarity of lyrics even in the high-energy, and powerful ‘The Bitch of Living’ and ‘Totally Fucked’.

Kim Schenkelaars deserves huge credit as Choreographer and for including so much energy and variety into the dance routines. All movement from the 13-person cast conveyed real emotion and truly reflected the action. The graveside scene was moving and poignant, the various fight scenes were realistic and worrying but it was the passion, frustration and release of teenage anger in ‘The Bitch of Living’ and ‘Totally Fucked’ that was exceptional. Overall, the choreography was fabulous and really added to the show’s appeal.

Veronique Piercy gave an excellent performance as Wendla demonstrating not only a fabulous singing voice but some exceptionally strong acting skills. Challenged with portraying this naïve girl, whose mother was too embarrassed to tell her the facts of life, Veronique interpreted the role beautifully and gave a believable performance. Treading a fine line between her awakening sexuality and innocence, Veronique handled the role with considerable skill and empathy.

Matthew Wright was ideally cast as Melchior and also gave an excellent performance. With great stage presence, and an excellent singing voice, Matthew gave a terrific performance. As both an atheist and aware of the facts about human reproduction, Matthew portrayed this comparatively knowledgeable young man with care and feeling.

Glen Jordan portrayed Moritz, the sensitive youth distracted from his studies by his incomprehensible sexual awakening, extremely well. Glen's body language fully supported the character and the audience was left in no doubt as to his anxiety and shame at his adolescent thoughts. Coupled with just the right amount of teenage angst Glen's emotional acting of his songs showed a total understanding of what he was portraying. Moritz's suicide and resulting graveside scene were both excellent pieces of drama.

Lewis McKenzie (Hanschen) and Nigel Fullerton (Ernst) both gave strong performances as the two secretly gay adolescents discovering their own sexuality. Whilst Hanschen was more accepting of his true sexual identity, Ernst was more confused and questioning. Both Lewis and Nigel developed their respective characters with consideration and thought. The stage kiss was handled with both a degree of humour and awkward sensitivity making it believable.

Ellie Jones gave an excellent performance as the long-suffering Martha who suffered abuse from her father and carefully hid the results. This was an incredibly sensitive part to undertake and Ellie fully developed this character with care and consideration.

Having previously seen Jamie Miller-Hughes onstage in several leading roles, it was pleasing to watch as she supported this production in the cameo role of Ilse. Jamie is an excellent actress with a great voice and powerful stage presence, the perfect person to lead the company in the final number, 'The Song of Purple Summer'.

The remainder of the young Principals all had their characters firmly established and the audience quickly understood each personality and their feelings. Rosie Miles (Thea), Carly Bond (Anna), Barry Lattimore-Quinn (Georg) and Nick Dore (Otto) provided great support with their various cameos performances, singing and dancing.

Josh Yard and Laura Harrison both did exceptionally well in playing every adult part and for delivering some chilling moments together with humour and even sensitivity. Their scenes as grieving parents were extremely well handled and all their various characters carefully reflected general attitudes of the time period. .

Ben Waterhouse (Stage Manager), Rachel Kennedy and Zoe Dobell (Deputy Stage Managers) and Adam Ballis (Assistant Stage Manager) combined to ensure everything ran seamlessly and with minimal fuss. The actual set was uncomplicated and provided maximum space on stage for the cast. The balcony (hayloft) was an excellent idea and use of space. Having the cast move props as part of the performance worked well and kept the pace high.

Richard Pike was responsible for the Lighting whilst Stuart Vaughan handled the Sound. Once again, at a Cygnet Players' production, the technical support ran smoothly and certainly there is nothing negative to mention here.

Costumes were designed/constructed by Phoebe Fleetham being of a good quality and also appropriate for the time period and setting.

Rosie Smith took on responsibility for Props which were all of good quality and appropriate for the time period and setting. I thought the use of school chairs and the piano/desk transformation were particularly well done.

Zoe Dobell was responsible for putting together a quality programme for this show. Looking like a child's school work book, it was of a high standard and included much information for the audience to enjoy reading. There were some great photographs of rehearsals, cast biographies and interesting notes from the Chairman and Director. It was also pleasing to see the programme so well supported by advertisers and, of course, the prominent NODA reference.

This certainly was a thought-provoking and sometimes uncomfortable show to watch but one that made for an excellent choice as a smaller production. Giving the young and talented cast something incredibly 'different' to tackle was commendable. I'm not convinced this is the sort of show that would attract sufficient numbers to a major production - but an excellent choice here.

Cygnet Players is fortunate to have such a depth of talent in their membership and with four productions scheduled for 2019 this is indeed a busy year. Congratulations to everyone at Cygnet Players and thank you for inviting me along to this production of 'Spring Awakening'. I look forward to attending 'All Shook Up' in September and wish you the best with that production.

Des Wilby
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