

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead - But Theatre in Fredericton is Not

An intelligent production of a brilliant play, this past week saw the performance of Show Stoppard Production's interpretation of Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Alison Luke's vision of the piece came to life flawlessly, and once again Fredericton was witness to a production where absolutely everyone in the play knew what it was he/she was doing and why and how it fit into the context of the piece.

Thoroughly entertaining performances by both Shawn Malley as the confused and bumbling Rosencrantz and Richard Spacek as the hyper-philosophical Guildenstern crystalized the production into a cohesive whole; the players worked not to or around but with each other. This is tough stuff; Stoppard's creation takes elements from everywhere from Shakespeare to Woody Allen, and manages to create intense, thought provoking and immensely funny dialogue which batters back and forth in word play that simply must be understood and believed to perform with success.

It's tough to review this production in the sense that, as is sadly rare in Fredericton, we got to see the play. Let me explain. This is, as I said before, a brilliant play. It's premise alone (merely looking at the idea of the other side of the story for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) is enough to make one goggle; to have the characters so stridently defined and so definitely constructed in the context of farce and satire with a heavy ladelling of death-oriented philosophy is beyond belief. And it works so wonderfully. Now, the problem is that when this work is performed as well as it was by the Show Stoppard Theatre group, one tends to forget that there are actors on stage and gets wrapped up in the wonderful complexities and subtle to slapstick humor of the work itself.

Alison Luke's direction and blocking were, for lack of a better term, right on. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spend a lot of time engaged in intense and complex dialogue, and to find something for them to be doing in the midst of this is a challenge. From a rhetoric game sword fight to Spacek and Malley's Laurel and Hardy -esque movements and interactions, the dialogue not only came across, but came to life with a physical reality. Awesome.

Also of note were everyone else in the cast - not a weak link to be found. Kent Thompson's performance as The Player gave just the right amount of contrast to the two main characters as they follow him around with a mixture of disgust and desperation. The Tragedians (choreographed by Kent Thompson) were also wonderful, and even in roles where there is no dialogue, these people knew why they were on stage

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead

A play by Tom Stoppard
Directed by Alison Luke

Cast:

Rosencrantz: Shawn Malley	Claudius: Gary Waite
Guildenstern: Richard Spacek	Gertrude: Genevieve Bosse
The Player: Kent Thompson	Hamlet: Greg Doran
Alfred: Nicole Marin	Ophelia: Kate Rogers
Tragedian 1: Rodger Wilkie	Polonius: Brent Dinsmore
Tragedian 2: Julie McGowan	Soldier: Brent Dinsmore
Tragedian 3: Clinton Breau	

"We are tied to a language that makes up with
obscurity what it lacks in style"

and what their part was in the whole thing. Great stuff.

A few words of thanks to Michael Friesen, the Composer/Musician, who made me believe, as I haven't for a long time, that live music in the form of soundtrack-style embellishment can not only work, but can truly enhance a production.

The stage was effective and interesting, as was the lighting, as were the costumes, good lord, there must be something bad I can say. I hate Mem Hall for plays. There it is. Stuffy, old, and not meant for theatre, Mem Hall is yucky.

Whoopie. let's hope Show Stoppard Productions will do it all again next year. Thanks again.

Chris Hunt

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