

Priscilla, Queen of the Desert

Date

Saturday 2nd June 2018

Society

The Wranglers Theatre Company

Venue

The Muse Theatre, Plymouth

Type of Production

Musical

Director

Wendy Holmes

Musical Director

Gavin Martin

Choreographers

Wendy Holmes and Ricky-Lee White

Report

'Priscilla, Queen of the Desert' is, of course, based on the hit 1994 film starring Guy Pearce, Terence Stamp and Hugo Weaving.

The musical is even more camp, sassy, outrageous, spectacular, over-the-top, ostentatious, flamboyant, bold and spirited than the movie! Although the story line may not be to everyone's taste – bad language, homosexuality, transgender, drag queens, Australia - you just have to sit back and enjoy the spectacle that was The Wranglers Theatre Company's 2018 musical.

Three drag queens (one of them transsexual) travel across the desert from Sydney to Alice Springs in an old bus (Priscilla) and experience numerous 'adventures' along the way.

There was a fun trio playing the male leads: Josh Cook was drag queen Mitzi Mitosis, known as Tick, on his way to meet his son, Benji (nicely played by young Freddie Jones, always bringing a sparkle to the shows I've seen recently), who wishes to meet him; second is bitchy Felicia (Dan Lidstone), and the experienced Jonathan Clarke brings Bernadette, the transsexual, to the stage. This trio were all good in their roles and coped admirably in their many outrageous female costumes. They had tender moments of dialogue, which swiftly changed with earthy comedy lines, especially Bernadette.

A great deal is demanded of our triumvirate, as they have to drive the show, elicit our sympathy, amuse us, entertain us and dominate the stage throughout. For the most part, this was something that they managed very well and they all provided excellent company on their journey. However, I never really felt that there was a real bond between them, nor did I really understand why it was that their journey should be so fraught with outbursts of personal animosity. Incidents of potential drama in the show were often thrown away as a result, the

emotional impact, or any real feelings of connection were thus weakened, and the exploration of some of the issues, which were raised at several points in the show, were blunted. That said, Josh Cook as Anthony/Tick was so likeable that it was impossible not to warm to him, Dan Lidstone as Adam/Felicia flounced and amused the audience at every turn and Jonathan Clarke's Bernadette added the much-needed chalk to Felicia's cheese, although he was too restrained for me in this role.

On their travels they meet many interesting characters including Bob, the mechanic, who takes a liking to the trio and, in particular, Bernadette. Geoff Coventry played this difficult role with style and ease. Matthew Day also got in touch with his feminine side as Miss Understanding. Julie Farmer was entertaining as the raucous, unkempt, loud-mouthed female Shirley, and what can I say about Taryn Fay as Bob's wife, Cynthia? Words fail me. She threw herself into her role singing whilst demonstrating the art of "popping" ping-pong balls from the most unexpected part of her anatomy. Hilarious and confidently played!

One of the real strengths of this company is the quality of character acting from the talented team of performers and, thankfully, this was once more in evidence here: another good example being Carly Salisbury as Marion who impressed in really bringing her cameo character to life.

Musically, you know the famous pop songs – Go West, It's Raining Men, A Fine Romance to name but a few. The band under the expertise of Musical Director Gavin Martin did a good job. The Ensemble singing was strong and enthusiastic throughout. The choreography devised by Wendy Holmes with Ricky-Lee White was energetic and danced well, mostly whilst the cast were wearing outrageously gigantic costumes and singing. It was all flamboyantly impressive.

The singing was generally impressive from the principals and particularly Emily Andov, Georgia Parnell, Jennie Farmer, Kerry Hore, Nieve Fay and Sian Hoskin as the Divas, all of whom have excellent voices and blended beautifully. They were a class act throughout, although perhaps one or two of them could have smiled more and allowed for more expression in their faces at times!

Everything about this show was BIG - Priscilla, the famous bus; the fantastic array of outrageous and spectacular costumes (massive credit to Sue McLoughlin, Jane Down, Angie Wilson and Emma Skedgel); the make-up; the effective lighting, the commitment and stamina of the stage crew, and the high-energy calibre of a fine cast.

The show bounces its merry way from scene to scene and location to location - each one as wearily familiar in tone as the last. The thin plot and the rather monotonous (and flat) dialogue means that a production of 'Priscilla' has to rest on its 'look': choreography, lighting, scenery, props and make-up all have to be of a high standard, otherwise we are left with a show that roughly approximates a school disco. Fortunately, this production pulled out all the stops to make the experience a visually enjoyable one for a very receptive and enthusiastic audience. The conveyor-belt of bizarre and fun outfits, which boogied their way across the stage came thick and fast, and one whirling, glitzy dance routine followed on from another at a breathless pace.

Director Wendy Holmes and Co-Choreographer Ricky-Lee White pitched this production just right. The enthusiastic reaction from the audience was totally justified. This really was a show where the feel good party atmosphere is all-important and this production carried it off in spades. The carnival atmosphere was well maintained and provided a very appreciative full house with a sparkling, glittery disco ball of a show: it looked good, sounded good and it was a very enjoyable evening at the theatre. I am looking forward already to the 2018 pantomime, 'Jack and the Beanstalk' in December!

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