

## **“HAMLET” – Dunstable Rep**

In a departure for the Rep, this their first Shakespeare for many years, this was a very quirky and different production, which gave a new slant on the play and made it more approachable. The use of tabs at different stage levels, and a minimum of set otherwise, created the right almost unearthly feel to the piece, whilst the actors gave us the more down to earth feel in their dialogue – a good mix.

The costumes supervised by Christine Sinfield and wigs from House of Hair were excellent, and what could have been a dour and drab production, was somehow vibrant and exciting. The pace of the dialogue sometimes meant we were very hard-pressed to keep up and get the full meaning of a speech, but having said that, it was a long play and the speed of delivery helped! Lighting was very good, another design from Dave Houghton, and technically everything worked to bring the whole to a very satisfying conclusion. Mozart’s Requiem as background music was evocative and lent a certain atmosphere to the play. I think from the above you can tell that I was impressed with the technical aspect of the production, as well as the acting skills we were treated to.

The title role of Hamlet went to the versatile Peter Carter-Brown, who gave us a diverse range of expressions and meanings within the dialogue that is often very well known. I thought his delivery of To Be or Not To Be was unexpected, but it worked. Peter created a slightly querulous and maniacal Hamlet, and although he was one whose pace was sometimes a little too quick, and at times he seemed to slip a little too far from the original, I thought he was a good choice for a difficult role, and brought it really alive. Phil Baker as the Ghost was shown in hologram, which was superb, and so much more evocative than him appearing on stage as ghost, in fact I was sitting next to him in the audience, so it was slightly surreal experience, but as he said, it was a great way to have a part in a production, but also to be able to appreciate the play from an audience point of view as well! The fishmonger scene was funny and lightened the mood, as did several other parts of the play, which I wouldn’t have normally seen as amusing at any stage!

Kim Albone was a very nice Ophelia, I particularly believed in her madness – very well done. Certain of the actors who Rep audiences know well and others who were new to the Company, gave us well-crafted performances, I am thinking in particular of Jenna Ryder-Oliver as Gertrude, Stephanie Overington as Horatio (again a very mature performance from this young lady), Marc Rolfe as Laertes, Steve Loczy and Katie Elliott as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Dave Corbett as Claudius, plus Alistair Brown as Polonius, looking very much like the devious and cunning Red Eminence himself (Cardinal Richelieu), which seemed completely fitting as the play was set in the times of the French Revolution, and I assume was the idea – although I’m sure someone will tell me if I’m wrong!! Alistair gave Polonius a certain rather sly side, with some sarcastic undertones, which gave the part new meaning for me.

I liked the transfer of meaning of the characters, it made the play itself more interesting, as we were never too sure what was going to come next, and definitely gave it more life and vibrancy. Annalise certainly gave us a new insight into Hamlet, and brought it to life, which shows her extreme knowledge of the play itself, and her unique way of seeing beyond the norm. The sword fight was nicely choreographed, and not taken too quickly, so that it was precise and there was never any doubt who was killing who.

Some parts were better played than others, but on the whole I was both engaged and uplifted by this new take on Hamlet, which was much more palatable for me than the original, and one which I enjoyed. Looking at the technical credits it appears that Annalise was involved in more or less every element, which meant she got the whole production the way she saw it. It was this attention to detail that helped make this a good production, both to see and to hear.

***Nova Horley***