

“The Lion in Winter”

I must admit I thought this play might be a bit dry, but it was full of humour, nicely managed by the cast, so that we got the highs and lows of fun and aggression, with the occasional glimpse of sadness, and deceit thrown in.

The set worked really well, it gave the cast room to move around, whilst confining the action to the particular setting. Annalise Carter-Brown, as well as directing, designed the set and was responsible for the props, and it all interlinked extremely well. There were some interesting lighting effects that gave the right feel and ambience for the time in which the play was set.

On the whole I thought the play was well cast, the younger actors did exceedingly well, with the characters showing diversity and understanding. I liked the contrasts between the three sons, and the almost ordinariness of Philip, it all added such interest to the proceedings.

Rona Cracknell, as Eleanor – once again gave us a flawless performance, getting the rather whimsical quality of an imprisoned Queen, but one who would stoop to all sorts of scheming to try and secure her freedom and succession for the right son. For me, Rona had the elegance but deviousness required, and gave a fine performance.

Stephanie Overington also shone, I love her approach to her characters, she gives us such depth. Alaïs is basically an innocent pawn in the game, Henry’s lover, but set to marry one of his sons. Stephanie showed us her love for the King, and her revulsion for Richard, or indeed any of the sons who was in favour at the time. Her love for Henry was naive but heartfelt nonetheless. A lovely performer and someone who should go far.

Alex Brewer in his first play for the Rep, showed the different sides to Richard, his contempt for his younger brother, his love for his mother, and his disbelief in his father. Good character, and nice to see Alex with a role he could get his teeth into, one which he did very well.

Another newcomer Anthony Bird, was the softer, gullible younger brother John, still a child but promised the kingship at one stage and Alaïs as a wife, only to have it all taken away from him on a whim. The rather gentle, simple soul came through well, and I liked what he did with the part.

The middle brother Geoffrey, was a good role for Josh Thompson, as he was able to exercise his talents in cunning and slyness, which he did exceedingly well. I was watching him at one stage when the action wasn’t centred on him, when he was standing behind Alaïs, his the longing and conniving were all evident in his face. Josh is maturing into a good performer, and I liked how he handled this part, he was so obviously the clever but passed over son, and it was all there in the expression and body language.

Joe Hawkins was a young Philip, a little like a puppy who was eager to please, but accepted the fact he couldn’t please everyone, so should perhaps go his own way. Another good casting – a very believable character.

Henry, the father, trying to secure his kingdom in safe hands, was played by Alan Goss, an old hand at this type of part. I got his insecurities, but his cunning in

playing his sons and their mother off one against the other – not a pleasant man. And then there was Alais – I suppose it was normal in those days, but not a pleasant thought to be confronted with.

So, all in all a very good production, with excellent casting – Annalise obviously has a very good eye for what she wants to achieve, and who can achieve it for her, as this was classy in look and feel, and with the atmospheric music used, created a superb evening's entertainment, which I wasn't expecting- so thank you all for managing to surprise me and give me a challenging play to review.

Nova Horley