



Society : RICHINGS PLAYERS
Production : CHILDREN OF EDEN
Date : 6th July 2011
Venue : IVER VILLAGE HALL
Report by : John C. Draper

Report

STAGING & SET

When I walked to my seat it seemed that the set was covered in drapes waiting to be revealed. Then it became clear it WAS the set. And what an excellent & appropriate set it was. **LINDA LUCAS, RICHARD CAMPBELL & SARAH PINKNEY** had designed a practical and highly effective environment for such a production. The varied levels and the sloping all-purpose central piece were exactly right to enable the subsequent presentation to be highly flexible, making excellent use of the limited space. It meant that the entire production flowed smoothly without any interruption or scene-changing delays.

LIGHTING

LES BREWER, (That well-known perfectionist) did his usual perfect job. The Up-Stage Right effect on the Tree of Knowledge and the Ark were very good and the lighting changes were on cue and appropriate. No shadows or missed areas and the spotting of groups and individuals was accurate and effective.

SOUND

ROBIN BISHOP & ROGER KNIGHT achieved the aim of every sound engineer which is to create perfect sound without the audience being conscious of the fine-tuning and subtle techniques, which ensure the sound is never intrusive. The balance between music and singing was perfect and the dialogue was mostly clear and strong.

COSTUME

The talents of the ubiquitous **LINDA LUCAS** are many and varied and the costumes were a prime example of successful design. They appeared simple but a lot of thought had gone into their creation. **THE FATHER'S** costume was a triumph of a picture of someone who is only in peoples' minds. Their images of God can vary so much and the flowing unbroken white was beautifully neutral and would satisfy everyone's imaginations
The use of identical tabards for the growing Cain & Abel was simple but effective, and the variation of colours and styles of the different characters painted a great picture. Dressing **YONAH** in brighter colours than **AYSHA & APHRA** told a story by itself.

STAGE MANAGER

DAVID BAINBRIDGE ran a smooth seamless production. Admittedly, he and **CALLUM BROWN** had no real scene changes but everything and everybody needs to be in the right place at the right time, and they were.

PROPERTIES MANAGER

If ever there was an underestimated support role it's this job so ably undertaken by **HANNAH CLEMENTS**. Once again this is a job where the responsibility is of having allegedly inanimate items available when needed and in the right place. Unfortunately Property managers have the handicap of having to deal with actors who never return their props and forget where they left them. But the props for this production, albeit simple, were there as needed and were appropriate and effective

HAIR & MAKE-UP

CHERYL CUTTING & SHELLY DAWSON ensured that all the cast looked the part and, more importantly maintained it throughout.

THE PROGRAMME

KATHRYN PIKE had brought her usual high standards of professionalism to every aspect of programme creation. Good quality paper, appropriate font and fine use of colour. The apple and tree logo was brilliant. And not only was the photography excellent, it was positioned perfectly. Very comprehensive biographies and production details enhanced and completed a very informative programme. Thank you for the NODA acknowledgement.

FRONT OF HOUSE

I received the usual warm welcome and hospitality. The start was spot on time with the audience seated and ready. I very much liked **ADRIAN'S** cleverly phrased mobile 'phone request. The interval ran smoothly and was just the right length.

THE CAST

THE ENSEMBLE

As most people know, I consider the Ensemble to be the most important ingredient in a musical. The principle characters need to have confidence in the people performing behind and around them and be certain they are being given the support they all need.

In this production they most certainly were and much more. I don't believe I have ever seen an ensemble so beautifully together and so consistently hard working. They showed real teamwork and presented a true example of the "wow factor".

Beautifully synchronized movements and wonderful singing and dancing, but what was also important were their great moments of absolute stillness. Looking up at The Father with awe and rapt attention, there was total immobility. Not even a face muscle twitched and the expressions were above brilliant. The statues could have been made of stone. And it was universal. There was no weak link. You all went

the extra mile and don't any of you dare to say, "I was only in the chorus" " you deserve the highest congratulations.

THE PRINCIPLE STORY TELLERS

ALISON ELCOAT, PETE GIBBS and AMANDA NORFOLK were great choices to be given the extra solo spots and they sang with strength & vitality. If I add "especially the ladies" that does not detract from Pete's performance!

THE CHARACTERS

THE FATHER - WARREN PALMER was perfectly cast. He radiated a strong presence and authority and his changes of moods were gently done and his encounter with an angry Cain was cleverly controlled. My notes say "Consistently good faultless performance". His singing was both powerful and evocative. He was the Creator whose creation was both a delight and a dismay and he showed both emotions wonderfully.

ADAM / NOAH - The dual casting between Acts I & II was very well thought out for everyone and **MICHAEL LUCAS** played both his roles with the right amount of subtle changes. His interaction with Eve and Mama Noah both played by Joe Gibbs was wonderfully done by both of them. And at the end of "Grateful Children" I wrote, "Perfect" and almost immediately they sang just that. And it was! Both Michael's singing and acting was of a high calibre and his singing got stronger as the evening progressed. "The Hardest Part of Love" was brilliant.

EVE / MAMA NOAH - An inspired pairing for **JOE GIBBS** who shares the credit for the above paragraph. "Spark Of Creation" was beautifully sung and Joe's beautiful and versatile voice sparkled through both acts. But Joe also has considerable acting talents. Her expressions were wonderful windows to her soul and her body language and gestures reflected every mood. After the death of Abel, Joe showed a beautiful sincerity. Not only did she sing "Spark Of Creation" well she acted it as well. Joe is a very talented young lady.

CAIN / JAPETH & ABEL / HAM - RICHARD CAMPBELL & WILL TORRENT Another piece of good casting. "Lost in the Wilderness" was a great duet, building to a climax and making use of two very good voices. Cain's anger and frustration was well shown in his encounter with The Father. In Act II the two were great belligerents but could also show deep affection and the character change between acts was very significant. They made the change without visible difficulty.

SETH / SHEM - TOM HODGE has the ability to show mixed emotions and gave two very creditable performances. Obviously comparatively inexperienced he can be well pleased with his performance and more experience will strengthen his stage presence and allow him to relax more. I send you good wishes for Nathan Detroit. It's a great part.

AYSHA & APHRA - STEPHENIE DUNLEAVY & VIKKI MIDDLETON who had already excelled in Act I played Noah's daughters-in law very well. They succeeded in being part of the family and reacted beautifully to the dire circumstances. "What Is He Waiting For" was a triumph for everyone involved.

BETHANY PERRY playing YONAH was wonderful. She managed to look so vulnerable and yet showed a strength of character far beyond her years. "Whatever Time We Have" with Japeth was

beautifully sung. She created a gentle emotion and her singing reflected this. She looked and sounded great.

FRED GIBBS & ELEANOR DAWSON played young CAIN & ABEL very well. Their voices were so very clear and, although they grew up very quickly, they made a very important contribution to the development of the family. Well Done!

All these comments are the result of a huge amount of concentrating hard work by the people concerned. But individual talent needs developing into a bigger picture of excellence and, without some very special people; the picture could not have been painted.

SO

DIRECTION - MUSICAL DIRECTION- CHOREOGRAPHY

The highest possible praise must go to **SARAH PINKNEY, JULIA SHERIDAN, ERICA TUGWELL & LEY DOBSON.**

SARAH rightly acknowledges her colleague's important contribution and as a quartet you have wrought your own miracle. Synergy is simply making $2 + 2 = 5$. And you made it equal to what ever number you want to choose. I was hugely impressed how the large cast were as one. It was as though they had been joined by an invisible thread of togetherness. Their bodies moved as one; their expressions reflected identical emotions. Their voices did not merely harmonize; they became a single entity. And I very much include the excellent choir who, although seated separately, were certainly not apart. And dove-tailed beautifully into the events on stage.

And this is why I have put the four of you together, acknowledging that Sarah was the prime mover. The reason is that, not only were the cast "as one," so were your respective disciplines. And you could not see the joins. Your strengths lay in the overlapping of your contributions. The movements, the dancing, the staging, the music from the excellent orchestra, the singing; it all overlapped and synchronized as though welded together. Such bonding is to your joint credit and I'm sure with your excellent co-ordination over the past months, you won't mind being praised as one. Simply because you were!

FINALLY

I would like to list some of the "spine tingling" moments. The moments which either brought a lump to your throat or had you gasping at the perfection of the occasion.

The inspiring impact-making opening of each act.

The dancing during "*Naming*"

Adam & Eve's emotional relationship

"*Perfect*" was just that.

"*World Without You*"

Abel's murder – wonderful staging

The brief moment of *a capello* and the whistling interlude

The symbolic close of Act I

Japeth & Yonah's "*In whatever time we have*"

"*What is He Waiting For?*"

The Principle Story-Tellers' Solos

You will hopefully have gathered from the above that I was impressed. But what you don't know is just how great that achievement was. The show synopsis did little to excite me and it seemed a strange one to choose both from the subject and the content. I was never a great fan of *Godspell* and *Children Of Eden* has no instantly recognized hit. But Sarah's vision was well-founded. I was converted within minutes.

Could anything have been improved? Well I would have preferred not to see a costumed cast-member standing at the box office chatting. In the very early part of the show some words were lost and for the opening it would have been better to have music during the entry of the cast. And that's about it.

Thank you for inviting me and good luck for Dick Whittington.

John C. Draper