

NODA Review

Production

The Corn is Green

Date

13/10/18

Society

The Southwick Players

Venue

The Barn Theatre, Southwick.

Type of production

Play

Director

Susanne Crosby

Report

Dee Sharpe

This was a huge, multi-layered, compelling play, masterfully or rather, with the play in mind, 'mistressfully' directed by Susanne Crosby. It was engrossing, moving, funny and thought-provoking and the acting was superb

Set in a house in a small mining village in Wales, in the late 19th century it has feisty, fearless, school teacher Miss Moffat arriving to take up residence, determined to teach the illiterate local miners, some as young as 12. She begins by giving neighbours, deeply religious Mr Jones and pretty spinster Miss Ronberry a few home truths and virtually ordering them to help her. Her enthusiasm is contagious but she gets discouraged by local opposition, in particular from the Squire. When she discovers huge potential in one of her students, Morgan Evans, she decides to tutor him towards a scholarship at Oxford.

The magnificent set was a timber beamed cottage with front door and windows with views out to a stone wall and picket fence with the Welsh valley beyond. Other doors led off to the parlour, the kitchen and a staircase. The living room had three bookcases, a large rug, chaise longue, armchair, bureau, desk, lovely oil lamps and coat hooks by the front door. The addition of desks and chairs quickly transformed it into a home-school classroom. Little touches throughout, such as Miss Moffat wheeling a Victorian bicycle through the door and visitors hanging their coats on said hooks added to the realism, as did the season changes seen through the windows, and the falling snow which visitors had to shake off their coats as they entered.

The costumes were well thought out, with the long skirt and high necked blouse and tie for Miss Moffat contrasting well with the floaty feminine silk and lace gowns of Miss Ronberry. The Squire was of course impeccably suited, unlike the flat capped, knickerbocker wearing miners. There was a lovely traditional Welsh costume and an extravagant blue velvet gown and hat for the returning Bessie.

Louise Yeo owned the character of Miss Moffatt with her upright stance, bossiness, mannerisms and marching gait as well as her good-hearted enthusiasm. She was almost continuously on stage. Eden Webber perfectly portrayed rough and ready miner Morgan Evans with his surprising depth of intelligence and language who was not always sure if he wanted to achieve what Miss Moffat was so determined he should. There was a hugely powerful scene where Morgan, overwhelmed and driven by Miss Moffatt's military style and seeming coldness refuses to continue with his studies causing her to respond with shock, disbelief and fury. Another exquisitely acted scene was when Miss Moffatt played helpless damsel to get the Squire's (H Reeves) support and the way he is taken in; also her ferocious rage at Bessie (Katie Marshall) and the way Bessie managed to portray genuine fear clothed with nonchalance.

Reeves was tremendous as the vain, patronising squire giving us a touch of John Cleese in his manner. His drunken bumbling was hilarious. Reformed tealeaf and rough diamond housekeeper Mrs Watty played by Debbie Creissen was an absolute hoot delivering lovely one liners with a deadpan expression and perfect timing. Katie as her daughter Bessie gave a droll performance as a bored, bolshy, scheming teenager. The supporting cast, Gary Cook, Becky Dowling, Louis Johnson and David Aitchison played their parts with aplomb.

There was a strong village community atmosphere and the Welsh accents and language added to sense of place as did the songs from the Brighton Welsh Male Voice Choir.

The thought, detail, teamwork and sheer amount of hard work that went into this production was tremendous and the backstage and creative team, alongside the actors should be very proud of this worthy entry for the 2018 Brighton and Hove Arts Council Drama Awards.
