

Report

Dee Sharpe, NODA

Set in Paris in the 19th Century the play has Therese Raquin living with her painstakingly fussy husband Camille and dominating mother in law in an apartment above their shop. Stifled and taken for granted she has embarked on a passionate affair with Camille's artist friend Laurent. The pair plot to kill Camille, carrying out their evil plan on a river trip. Camille's mother, utterly bereft, has no idea of the pair's treachery and eventually encourages them to wed. As the play unfolds their own guilt torments them to the extent that they come to loathe each other and the suspense ratchets up until the final powerful, unexpected twist at the end.

This complex play was directed with superb precision and expertly performed by an accomplished cast. The tension was palpable, yet beautifully controlled, and the touches of humour from Grivet (David Peaty) and Michaud (Derek Fraser) were droll and entertaining.

The scene changes were fast and smooth; executed in blackout with thriller style violin music which added to the building suspense. The lighting created appropriate moods and the changing daylight through the window was very effective. The reflection creating the eerie ghostliness to Camille's portrait was a master touch.

I loved the elaborate costumes, which looked tailor made and really suited each actor. I especially liked Therese's fitted jackets and skirts or gowns with their leg of mutton sleeves and the men's high collar shirts with cravats. I was not so keen on Madame Raquin's wig which was shiny and synthetic looking, but the ageing up face paint was so realistic it took me a little while to realise it was the much younger, glamorous Susanne Crosby.

The simple set with the two curtained arches, one to a hallway and one to the bedroom worked well. There was a table with chairs, a dresser, chaise longue and a couple of windows. Lovely touches such as a glowing fire and flickering oil lamps which could be turned on and off added authenticity to the proceedings, and there was a beautiful antique wheelchair. The portrait of Camille got some laughs for its sheer perfection and I loved the attention to detail which had a discoloured area on the wall when the old picture was removed in order to put the portrait up. The realism of the set allowed it to fade into the background, which afforded a much greater focus on the claustrophobic and jittery atmosphere.

There were strong performances from the actors and perfectly timed laughs which did not detract from the growing disquiet.

Rose Hall-Smith and Alex Bond as Thérèse and Laurent portrayed a believable relationship that had the flip side of love and hate. The way their passion deteriorated into guilt and loathing was convincing and magnetic. Each was skilful in portraying a character imprisoned by their own desires, and then by the situation that their crime had created.

Matthew Arnold as Camille was the perfectly pernicky mother's boy ensuring the audience totally empathised with Therese's repulsion towards him.

Susanne Crosby inhabited the character of Madame Raquin making her both dominating but also likeable. Her body language made you almost feel the aches and pains in her legs. Her pièce de résistance was a convincing portrayal of paralysis and her twisted smile of victory at the end.

David Peaty and Derek Fraser gave winning performances as Grivet and Michaud bringing a light-hearted contrast and highlighting the social way social niceties can cloak the darkest realities.

This was a melodrama bursting with plot, character, suspense and atmosphere delivered with sensitivity and skill. It is another triumph for Wick Theatre Company. Well done and thanks for inviting me.