

NODA Review

JANE EYRE NOMADS

When you stage such a well-known and much loved story as Jane Eyre you have to get it right and by and large NOMADS managed just that. It is a sweeping novel and demands a big cast and even doubling or in some cases trebling up in the twenty or more roles it still needed a company of 12 to pull it off -

Directors John Mitchell and Kevin La Porte's staging was minimal with a set of black boxes of various levels and large pieces of furniture brought on and off to give us Jane's childhood with the Reeds at Gateshead Hall, her miserable schooling at Lowood, where she eventually becomes a teacher, the village and home of missionary bound St John Rivers and the focus of the novel, Thornfield Hall. A whole Victorian world created in little more than imagination, and it worked well, aided by costumes with a look of authenticity from wardrobe mistresses Frances Watt and Sarah Smith.

With 31 scenes to cope with the changes need to swift. They were swift. Furniture was brought on and off quickly but they were also incredibly distracting, particularly when they happened during a scene. Personally I think the Directors had two choices here to make them less so, either costume the stage crew or alternatively use the Ensemble players to make the changes. The lighting on the cyclorama was excellent and extremely effective. Unfortunately this did not transfer to the front of the acting area where actors sometimes found themselves standing in the dark. Sound effects were good but maybe fading the birdsong slightly might be worth thinking about particularly as the scene was dialogue heavy.

The ten-strong ensemble did a fine job of keeping the storyline moving from one area of Jane's life to another. As well as playing in the Ensemble all ten played at least two other character roles. Each had made an effort to create separate entities with good success. Kristopher Camden gave nicely varied characterisations in his three roles, particularly that of St John Rivers. Sarah Nolan's Helen Burns was well done and also the childish Adele, just watch projection when speaking from up on the "balcony". Of the many other characterisations I liked Mary Rivers (April Cook), Mrs Fairfax (Fiona Maguire), Miss Temple (Lory Cosner) Teresa Baron's Dowager Lady Ingram, Chris Brighty's Richard Mason and I very much enjoyed both Steven Fenn's old retainer and also his Mr Briggs the solicitor. Both Kate Nolan and Kerry La Porte gave excellent performances as servants Leah and Bessie.

The well-known love affair between Jane and Rochester requires chemistry to make it work on stage. I thought Matthew Tatum was very good indeed. His irascibility came through well as did his impatience although I would have liked to have heard more warmth and tenderness vocally in the scenes with Jane which otherwise worked very well. Overall this was a good strong performance creating for us a very believable Mr Rochester.

Charlie Maguire as the title character was superb, starting with her unhappy start in life as an orphan then a schoolgirl through to her 18-year old adulthood. From downtrodden child to feisty woman of independent means this was a wonderful portrayal of one of literature's most loved heroines.

Congratulations to Directors John Mitchell and Kevin La Porte and all involved. This is a difficult play to stage but this was an admirable production. One which has determined me to read again this classic tale of Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester and of course the woman in the attic.

Julie Petrucci
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