

**MOONLIGHT & MAGNOLIAS**

NOMADS at The Kings Theatre, Newmarket.

In tandem with the play's character Ben Hecht I have never read the book (or seen the film), therefore I came to *Moonlight & Magnolias* with limited knowledge of *Gone With the Wind*. No other film can have made such an impact. It has become a legend in the history of cinema and even today, there can be few who don't respond to its sweeping theme music or aren't familiar with the famous riposte: Frankly, my dear I don't give a damn!

Ron Hutchinson's *Moonlight and Magnolias* was first seen in 2007 and, according to the author's interpretation, gives an account of how the screen-play for *Gone With The Wind* got rush-written in five days, when Hollywood mogul David O Selznick locks his hastily hired hands, screenwriter Ben Hecht and the director Victor Fleming in his office. Fuelled by bananas and peanuts, the three men embark on a marathon period together getting the proper screenplay written for the movie. As each day passes, the three men grow increasingly tired and crazier by the minute.

The set was first rate very light and airy, maybe a duller colour for the walls would have been preferable but it worked. Furniture and props were good as were the costumes. Lighting was rather bright for an interior but all areas were well lit. Sound effects were also good, I particularly liked the intercom.

Director Marion Hadley had schooled her cast well. Good use was made of the acting area and there were some nice stage pictures. Pace was good throughout and accents by the whole cast laudable. The cast consisted of four characters, Trevor Kartupelis as David O. Selznick the studio mogul, Andy McGowan as Ben Hecht the screenwriter, Steven Fenn as Victor Fleming the director, and Fiona Maguire as Miss Poppengul Selznick's dutiful secretary.

All three men did a splendid job, particularly Trevor Kartupelis. His was an exceptionally strong performance which it needed to be given that the script is extremely wordy. I would have liked more variation in delivery from Andy McGowan but it was a good performance nevertheless. Steven Fenn gathered confidence as Act 1 progressed culminating in an amusing reenactment in Act 2 of Melanie's birthing scene from *Gone With The Wind* with Selznick and Fleming acting out the parts for the benefit of screenwriter Hecht as he looks on for inspiration. When Hecht becomes offended that he has to write the slapping of Prissy by Scarlett O'Hara into the script, he protests because he finds the scene racially offensive. Selznick tries to convince him that it is necessary because he wants to stay true to Mitchell's book. In doing so a slapping scene a la The Three Stooges occurred. Overall though I think there is much more humour to be brought out than there was on the first night.

Last, but most certainly not least, Fiona Maguire, almost unrecognisable as Miss Poppengul, rounded out the cast as the only female character in the play. She was perfect in her role as Selznick's highly competent and obedient secretary. Her

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charming and repetitive “Yes, Mr. Selznick” was brilliant and her facial expressions matched the chaos she was observing. A superb cameo performance.

A play exploring the creative process behind such an achievement covered by this script came up with some fascinating insights. I certainly came away knowing a lot more about *Gone With the Wind* than I did on arrival. I also came away impressed with the skilfulness of Director Marion Hadley and her cast but feel that, had the title been more appealing or at least given some indication of content, the appreciative first night audience would have been a great deal larger.

Julie Petrucci

Regional Representative NODA East District Four South.