**NODA Review of ‘Pippin’ 28th September 2016**

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***Pippin***the 1972 Stephen Schwartz musical has an energetic pop-influenced score. The  storyline isn't exactly the stuff of a brilliant stage musical; but it ran for five years on Broadway.  It is the story of the French Prince Pippin, son of King Charlemagne. The show begins with the Leading Player and the other players (an acting troupe) inviting the audience to watch their magic as they help to tell the story. *Magic to Do* is a great opening number. They then introduce Pippin as a young man just out of a university. He tells how he is searching for the meaning of his life.

Constructed like Children’s Theatre—although it’s clearly for the older crowd, dealing with regicide, combat, and lust, to name a few—the first act is a chain of scenes: Pippin as warrior; Pippin as king; Pippin as sex machine. A band of storytellers assisting the Leading Player are transformed into a cast of trapeze artistes, hoop-jumpers, performing Cirque du Soleil-style feats, and though its never boring, some songs are almost upstaged by the staging: there is so much going on that we don’t know where to look.

Trenetta Jones made a beguiling narrator.  She is a strong singer and great mover, and made a sinister charismatic guide as the Leading Player, locking eyes with audience members throughout the evening.

As a dominating Charlemagne Kevin La Porte combined tyranny and humour with a little bit of rape and pillage thrown in while Deanne Haynes relished the part of his scheming, provocative queen Fastrada.

In a feisty performance Kate Nolan shone as Pippin’s grandmother Berthe singing of life’s simple pleasures whilst sitting high in a trapeze hoop, encouraging the audience to join in the chorus.

In the title role Andrew Ruddick  as Pippin engaged us fully in his impossible quest for the extraordinary. He has an excellent voice and a fine stage presence. “Corner of the Sky” and “Morning Glow”  were both beautifully sung.

Not so surprisingly Pippin’s quest for the “meaning of life” ends with the love of a good woman and Grace Dennis-Sayer in a fine performance as Catherine showed some good comic timing coupled with a very pleasant voice.

Others more than worthy of a mention are two up and coming young actors William Males (Lewis) and Jodie Corbett (Theo).  Last but certainly not least a huge “well done” to all ten of The Players the singing, dancing, circus skills etc. were meritorious throughout.

A production anywhere is only as good as its cast and crew, however, and NOMADS effectively combined excellent staging with first-rate talent.  The staging was colourful. Sarah Phelps and Doug DeBoys harlequinade painted trio of steps served multiple purposes and the scene changes were carried out swiftly and unobtrusively by (mostly) cast members.  Whilst Martha Gregg and John Moore excelled themselves with an impressive lighting design.  There was no glitzy costumed chorus-line but a spirited cast in black leotards, transformed as things progressed with frills and sequins.

Choreographer Emma Olley recreated some of Bob Fosse's original stylised choreography, and throughout the dancing was humorous, aggressive and seductive and at all times skilfully executed.

It was good to see Mark Aldous as NOMADS’ MD again, producing some excellent arrangements of the eclectic score.  The only problem for me, once or twice, was the music overpowered the soloists which, as the words of most songs moved the story on, was a shame.

This production introduced me to Pippin, a show I had not come across before and how the show resonates is wholly dependent on the viewer.  Well-directed by Steve Nicholson, it was sexy, witty, modern and amusing though somewhat surreal and, at times, practically Theatre of the Absurd.  Overall it was an intriguing evening and congratulations to all involved on producing an excellent version of this unusual show.