

THEATRE 2022

January 2022: SISTER ACT

This was a highly polished, professional, amusing performance by West Bridgford Society. Singing, acting, dancing, costumes - I couldn't fault it. Especially remarkable was the lead, Sascha Cornelius, who plays Deloris Van Cartier, a wannabe nightclub singer who has to be hidden by police in a convent as Sister Mary Clarence after she has witnessed a murder! She has a colossal part to play, singing, acting, dancing - this was a wonderful role for her to demonstrate her many talents.

Carolyn Broadhurst

February 2022: PRIVATE PEACEFUL

Michael Morpurgo's story of love and loss in war was faithfully and touchingly executed by just 8 actors. The so called "Great War" so often written about and portrayed was still refreshing and relevant and was made especially poignant as a few hours later that day Russian troops marched into Ukraine. I found myself wondering if the school children sitting behind us had much idea what it all meant then and now.

The story highlights the Peaceful family before and during the war and the close bonds which existed between the 3 brothers, two of whom went to the Somme to fight, the younger even lying about his age to be accepted. Events were played out against a background of brilliant sound effects and lively characters. There was some beautiful unaccompanied singing and the humming of "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag" was very moving. This is a play for our time, and we find ourselves asking whether human beings will ever see the futility of war. It seems sadly not.

Marianne White

March 2022: DON CARLOS

This Met production of Verdi's tragic opera blew our socks off when we went to see it at the Broadway. This was the French language version in 5 Acts and it added to the drama to see the early romance between Carlos and Elizabeth.

The singing was magnificent throughout and the orchestral playing was superb. When it's done well, there nothing that can beat the combination of passion, drama, singing and music in opera.

Paul Martinez

March 2022: JEKYLL AND HYDE

The total absorption and silence of the audience watching this play reflects the excellence of this performance. Apart from a few gasps at certain times, I was completely thrilled with the whole concept of the play that I forgot I was supposed to write an intelligent report!

It is a contemporary re-invention of a macabre classic where the civilised society of Mrs Jekyll meets the seedy Flossie Hyde of Soho. There was certainly some adult content but it was a truly topical intelligent thoughtful feminist take on the novel by Robert L Stevenson. Frank, uncompromising, fresh, and often quite confrontational – I enjoyed every moment and provoked a lot of thought. Again congratulations to the Lace Market Company and its director, who stood in for a Covid Struck actress. You never fail to deliver!

Janet Whitchurch

April 2022: RED ELLEN

A group of us spent the afternoon at Nottingham Playhouse watching Caroline Bird's new play about the later years of Ellen Wilkinson's life. She was one of the main organisers of the Jarrow march, saw to the constructing of air raid shelters and the distribution of Morrison Shelters and

later as the Minister for education increased the school leaving age to 15 among her many exploits. On her death all her personal papers were destroyed so the scenes in the play devoted to her private life are largely imaginary, but she certainly visited Germany and Spain so I suppose she could have met Einstein and Hemmingway.

The title role was played by Bettrys Jones an excellent fiery performance which commanded the stage throughout without over playing. She was very ably supported by six very versatile actors who changed smoothly from male to female and from performers to scene shifters. Camilla Clarke designed the set and costumes which worked very well moving seamlessly from bedrooms to burning buildings. There were some exciting moments but I personally thought it could have been better lit., and the sound system left a lot to be desired, in fact I had to move seats and obtain a set of loop earphones in the interval and this made the second act much more enjoyable. All in all it was an enjoyable, if somewhat long, thought provoking play.

Shirley Ellis

April 2022: HENRY V

We went to the Bonington theatre on St. George's day and Shakespeare birthday, very aptly, to see a performance of Henry V, the bard's play about the England and France at the battle of Agincourt. It has a modern day setting but with a very Shakespearean theme. In the lead, Kit Harington, playing Henry V was excellent.

It was broadcast from the Donmar Warehouse theatre, a small venue with not a lot of props but with the lighting and atmospheric sounds it came across as very dramatic. We all enjoyed it very much.

Jean Taylor

May 2022: FIRST TOUCH

Behind the beautiful game lies a shocking truth

As you enter the theatre you are confronted by steps of grass representing the overwhelming importance of football in the lives of the characters. The wallpaper sets the scene firmly in the seventies. On the wall are two ever present digital timers. One tells you the year, as the action flips from the present, to the past when Clayton, was a young teenager with a desire to succeed at football. He has great potential and his family support him in their own ways. The other digital clock is a clever device for building tension.

Clayton is from a mixed heritage family. His father works long hours at the steelworks with his brother-in-law, Kevin, the shop steward. He represents the strident political message in this play outlining the choice the characters have to make. The physicality of the cast members is skilfully woven into this story of a young man desperate to make it into the professional game. The key to this success is held by Lafferty, a football coach who took Clayton under his wing . football choreography in the training sessions require a lot of exertion as the actors make risky manoeuvres practising ball skills. This joyful energy wanes when we hear that Lafferty, is to return to the club.

Clayton's girlfriend Serena notices a change in his mood. Nothing is revealed but a dark shadow is cast over their relationship. His mind is preoccupied with earlier experiences. It is very moving as you see his hopes unravelling.

Male sexuality is explored with humour in Patterson's relationship with his younger son Courtney. Fearing he might be a gay, he pushes him to be like his older brother when the coach says he too has potential. Tensions rise as Clayton does everything to dissuade his family from allowing his brother to fall into Lafferty's clutches. But he still doesn't explain why. The relief is palpable when Courtney decides that he doesn't want to stay at the coach's house.

Finally in extra time Clayton explains that he is in his fifties before he summons up the courage to go to the police to describe what Lafferty did to him as a boy.

First touch is a football term but it is also a reference to the insidious behaviour which perpetuated itself in the *beautiful game*.

I found the play both deeply moving and entertaining considering the seriousness of the story. The cast and creative team created a tremendous energy in this production which was appreciated by an unusually mixed audience. It is heartening that the Creative Director is willing to take risks with new writers dealing with contemporary issues.

Terri Beale

July 2022: PEOPLE by Alan Bennett

Not for me one of Alan Bennett's best plays. Described as "hilarious, moving and a little bit naughty" I and I suspect a few others found it raised a titter and it really was more than a little bit naughty!!!

The play centres on two sisters who live in their ancestral home, but cannot afford to maintain it. One favours donating to the National Trust, but the other resists and explores other options. These include selling it to a shady consortium of investors, where they wish to hire it out as a film location to an old flame of one of the sisters, who shoots porn films.

The contrast couldn't be greater as one hates the idea of crowds trampling through her home, which would become an exhibit whereas the other sister is much more ambitious. She despairs of the future but the arrival of a former amour and his film crew breathes new life into her. The filming of the "adult" movie is pure farce as the male porn star is unable to rise to the occasion and needs "chemical enhancement". Enough said! Personal I found it seedy and broad minded as I am, rather embarrassing and unnecessary.

The upshot was that in the end the National Trust wins and the sister who opposed it has to put a brave face on it. Such is life!

There were a few moments of humorous farce but as I mentioned at the beginning certainly not one of Bennett's best. However my congratulations to the cast, especially the two sisters. They had an awful lot of words to learn and needed virtually no prompting! Well done you two!

Janet Whitchurch

July 2022: PRESSURE

During lockdown, I promised myself that, once I was set free, I would go to every single play at the Lacemarket Theatre. So far, I have not missed any of them. Some of them have been fair, some good, and some absolutely brilliant.

Today, I have been to see **Pressure** and it definitely fell into that last category! Brilliant play, brilliant performance. It tells the story of the preparations for the D-Day Landings, carefully planned by the Allies and anticipated to be the Beginning of the End. Timing was crucial. The tides were easy to predict. But the weather had to be exactly right to assist the Navy and the RAF. Bad weather would mean the loss of thousands of lives. The British and the Americans called in meteorological experts to ensure success - but, despite mammoth pressure, they failed to agree.

This was a play and a performance that left me emotionally drained. I know some of you won't believe me when I say that the D-Day Landings were before my time, but this was also a learning experience for me.

Carolyn Broadhurst

July 2022: IDENTICAL

Identical has everything you want from a new musical: a strong and straightforward plot, brilliant acting from the whole cast, energetic dancing, melodic songs, and affecting tugs on the heartstrings.

The young twins in the lead roles were amazing. I was also impressed by the wonderful stage design and effects, and the enthusiasm of the small live orchestra. Sixteen of us went over the two performances and really enjoyed ourselves. Well done Playhouse.

Paul Martinez

September 2022: THE CLOTHES THEY STOOD UP IN

It was so good see crowds queuing to get in to see The Clothes they stood up in after the lean years of Covid. Indeed so popular was it that an extra performance was added. Alan Bennett's novella (adapted for the stage by the well-known Adrian Scarborough who starred in the show alongside Sophie Thompson) was a class act.

Bennett's wit and dry humour shone through in the mundane details of Maurice Ransome's life. He is a pompous, emotionally stunted solicitor, whose life revolves around his belongings of which his long suffering wife is one. The plot involves a robbery, or was it a burglary, of the Ransomes' apartment, along with all their belongings. Bennett pokes fun at the police and their upside down bureaucracy and petty inefficiency, and at the OTT counsellor and her ridiculous gyrations. They make us laugh, but enrage Mr Ransome.

At another level the play reveals a troubled marriage lacking in warmth or closeness, and how differently the pair deal with their loss. Maurice cannot change his ways, while his wife develops her own strength, has what might be described as an erotic awakening, and gets shot of him. The sets were impressive and clever. This was comedy drama at its best.

Marianne White

October 2022: MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Shakespeare's plays are very often shortened in length but unusually this one was lengthened. Lots of time was spent adding bits here and there which to my mind contributed nothing to the play.

The sub-titles moved so fast to keep pace with the dialogue that I found it very hard to keep up with it and watch what was on stage. I found it way too long as well. Having said that, this talented, innovative company of deaf, disabled and non-disabled actors put on a Shakespeare that was slick, fast and lively; the choreography and set were impressive and the music and dance routines rhythmic and fun filled. The large cast of characters were convincing and colourful.

Marianne White

October 2022: AIDA

The Royal Opera House broadcast of Aida was a revelation. Out went the pageantry of ancient Egypt. In came a tale of love and desire set against the hatred and violence of war and conquest.

This updating of Aida made it seem both true to life and highly relevant to today. The singing and drama were brilliant and in the cinema you could see every nuance, every detail of the singers' love, despair jealousy and hatred.

The orchestral playing, conducted by Pappano, was astounding. I cannot recall a better synthesis of music and drama.

We certainly want to go and see more ROH broadcasts in the new year.

Paul Martinez

November 2022: HAYFEVER

This play is a comedy of manners about a family whose theatrical excesses torment a group of unsuspecting visitors. The story is that each of the four members of the family invite (without consultation with the others) a guest for the weekend. They are a mixed bunch, a sporty type, a waspish lady, a diplomat and a brainless but goodhearted clapper. Mayhem ensues particularly when they are invited to play parlour games. The hosts are in their element but the guests flounder.

Breakfast next morning is full of atmosphere and the family all talk at once and have a furious row such that they don't notice their guests leave. "How very rude" and "people do behave in the most extraordinary way!! With no further thought of their tormented guests they happily return to what passes as their normal family life. The play was very well done and in particular the lead role (Judith the mother) presented the absent minded theatrically of a retired star actress perfectly. A quite delightful play set in the 1920s it made for a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Well done again Lace Market Theatre.

Janet Whitchurch

November 2022: Dick Whittington

Fifty-two of us went to the pantomime. We were seated all over the place! And, as usual for the Playhouse, it was a very traditional, extravagant affair. One of the highlights for me was the underwater scene following the ship wreck, complete with sea life.

The pantomime dame was played once again by John Elkington - her costumes were even more outrageous this year and must have demanded some highly speedy changes between scenes. The dame, as usual, talked to a few children up on stage - it always amazes me how the Playhouse staff manage to select these children who seem brim-full of character! Anyway, look out for ***Cinderella*** next year!

Carolyn Broadhurst