

Theatre 2019

February 2019: WONDERLAND

Wonderland was first performed in Nottingham at the start of last year, and such was the success at the time, it's been brought back! Beth Steel, a miner's daughter wrote this play which takes place at the Welbeck Colliery during the 1984-85 miners' strike.

The set and sound designs conveyed something of what it's like to be in a descending cage, the claustrophobic and dangerous working conditions below and a lot more besides. Beth Steel sets up the story astutely with an accurate representation of both sides of what was a highly political and hugely emotional time in British History. The characters of the miners are well rounded and we enjoyed their humour - filthy, as there were no holding back in profanities. We saw two boys at the start of the play age cleverly from terrified teenagers to young men with responsibilities, family men.

In London, 1984, a conflicted Tory MP, a brash American CEO known as 'The Butcher' and an eccentric maverick form the face of a radical Conservative government preparing to do battle with the most powerful workforce - the miners. As the government representatives clash, the miners fight for their livelihoods and families and the government for a vision of a free Britain. Together they change the fabric of the nation forever. All in all, a wonderful piece of theatre which depicts an important part of our history.

Basia Arch

February 2019: CALAMITY JANE

If you have never visited The Space Theatre at the Nottingham Girls' High School, then you are in for a treat! New theatre, comfortable seats, and free car parking! What more could you ask for other than a very pleasant afternoon watching West Bridgford Operatic Society perform "Calamity Jane" all performed with polished style and great enthusiasm with a talented and experienced 16 piece orchestra.

In 1876 we find the sharp shooting tomboy Calamity Jane surrounded by cowboys, townfolk and the famous Wild Bill Hickok. After a mix up in the talent pool at Deadwood's saloon theatre Calamity goes to Chicago to transport to Deadwood the glamorous actress Adelaide Adams, but returns by mistake with her maid Katie Brown who has the inability to perform – however Katie wins the heart of the young Lieutenant Danny and when Calamity sheds her tomboy persona at a ball and becomes a true woman she realizes she loves Wild Bill – ANY THEY ALL LIVED HAPPILY AFTER!

Not the most uplifting of musicals, but extremely well done and a the acting, singing, (especially the chorus) costumes etc were all very creditable and without doubt we all knew the songs!

Janet Whitchurch

April 2019: FAUST

This opera was broadcast from the Royal Opera and was an absolute corker! Mephistopheles was brilliantly acted and sung by a stand out Erwin Schrott. Faust and Marguerite shone as the lovers and the orchestra played with gusto and emotion, conducted by Dan Ettinger. This was a revival of a much lauded production directed by David McVicar. It was atmospherically dark and vividly brought to life the battle between good and evil, and in this production, between the pleasures of the flesh on the one hand and religion and morality on the other, in a gaudy 19th Century Paris.

Paul Martinez

May 2019: THE MEMORY OF WATER

This is Nottingham Playhouse's new production of Shelagh Stephenson's Olivier Award-winning comedy written in the 1990s. Three siblings arrive at their remote home on the eve of their mother's funeral. Having grown apart the 3 women argue and joke as they sort through their mother's belongings and gradually confide about the realities of their own adult lives. However, when they move to childhood memories, they discover they remember things differently, leading to a series of dramatic and devastating revelations. It was a play about grief and the unreliability of memory. I felt this play walked a tightrope of balancing comedy and tragedy extremely successfully

There is resentment, loathing and even disgust as the women's complicated lives unravel, yet beneath it all the trio show that love binds them together. There are occasional appearances of the ghost of Viv, the mother who wanted to have fun in her life as well as bringing up her family. She mainly speaks to her eldest daughter Mary with recriminations on both sides regarding Mary's childhood. The first half of this production lacked confidence, pace and the early exchanges were semi audible because they were delivered too high a pitch but after the interval it became gripping as the secrets and lies emerged. The performances from the three sisters were excellent. Growing up, I had always wanted a sister but after watching this play, I'm extremely happy being one of three-the other two are brothers.

Basia Arch

June 2019: THE STEPMOTHER

A play of marriage, morals and misdemeanours, and remarkable in that it still rings horribly true a century after it was written! It shows women confronting huge financial inequalities – a women's helplessness in the face of male deviousness – and when the huge confrontation comes between the hardworking wife and the parasitic husband, he robustly declares "we are married people – and what's yours is mine" How dare he!

I freely admit I knew absolutely nothing about the play but as ever the Lace Market production was excellent, played to a full house. The two main characters were superb, the stepmother with a mix of guilelessness and guts, and the husband a blend of low cunning and intemperate violence.

I felt the whole audience were captivated by the story and no doubt many of them could relate it to the 21st century!

Well done again Lace Market.

Janet Whitchurch.

June 2019: DESIGN FOR LIVING

Take three creative types – two men, one woman – who are madly in love with each other and get them to pair up in just about any combination and you have the bare bones of the plot by Noel Coward at the Lace Market Theatre.

Kathryn Edwards was particularly successful as the muse/femme fatale with good support from the three male leads: Paul Spruce and John Halstead, and Matthew Finkel (who represents conventional, non-arty society). The play is not perhaps as witty as some other Coward offerings but the audience roared when Miss Hodge, the maid, said – in a strong cockney accent:

"I was married twice. My first 'usband's dead and the second's gorn ter Nottingham.....same thing really I s'pose".

Paul Spruce's extended mime of eating some disgusting cold rice pudding was also a delight. A great afternoon at the theatre and many thanks to Carolyn Broadhurst for organising.

Paul Martinez

June 2019: ONE NIGHT IN MIAMI

America, early 1964, a year after the Birmingham Campaign where peaceful protestors were turned on by the police, six months after Martin Luther King had made his 'I have a dream' speech, three months after the assassination of John F. Kennedy.....

On 25th February 1964, four very famous Black Americans meet at the Hampton House Hotel in Miami, Florida. One of them is Sam Cooke (33) - soul singer extraordinaire.

The second Jim Brown (28) the biggest name in American Football - now turned Hollywood actor.

The third Malcolm X (39) an American Muslim Minister and human rights activist who was a popular figure during the American Civil Rights Movement, where he served as the public face of the controversial Nation of Islam for whom he advocated (at the time) black supremacy.

The fourth man was Cassius Clay who hours earlier and against all odds, had become the World Heavyweight Boxing Champion, defeating the previous champion Sonny Liston by technical knock-out in the 7th round of their title fight.

That the four men were friends is interesting enough, but how, as high profile 'celebrities' they defied the surveillance and bullying tactics of J. Edgar Hoover to meet at various times is somewhat remarkable. Sam Cooke for example was ushered into the ring after the Clay /Liston fight (Clay remarking that Cooke was 'even prettier than him') and Clay had met Malcolm X publicly after Clay had announced he was nurturing an interest in Islam.

This is the backdrop to Kemp Powers powerful insight into this unexpected brotherhood, a play which explores through almost 'fly on the wall' techniques, the tumultuous political times that faced America in the early 60's. A play which allows the audience to be party to some of the central ideas of American Civil Rights, Black Power and the lives and views of four American idols, or as Malcolm X put it "America's bright future".

Conor Glean plays Cassius Clay, occasionally providing the sharp wit and comic timing of the boxer. His re-creation of how he beat Liston, while dancing around the bedroom, with Cooke (as Liston) in retreat is reminiscent of the great man's antics when cruelly teasing opponents. He also depicts Clay's brashness and his occasional vulnerability - showing particularly well the struggle he had adopting The Nation of Islam when other things, (particularly when he is Heavyweight Boxing Champion of the World), i.e. girls and drink are readily available.

Miles Yekinni plays Jim Brown another young man with the world at his feet but already tired of the trappings of Hollywood. To him, in my eyes was the best scene given. Where Brown and Malcolm X are locked in heated debate as to what was their social responsibility. "Are we to be weapons?" he asks angrily.

Christopher Colquhoun plays Malcolm X sympathetically in a performance portraying defiance and aggression on one hand to vulnerability and weakness on the other, particularly at the end when the two characters we thought were bodyguards, it seems were jailers.

The main plaudits must be reserved for Matt Henry who played Sam Cooke. As well as resembling the singer, he portrayed his character - singer, icon, businessman, womaniser - yet with a keen sense of the needs of black people in 1960's America, brilliantly. He can also sing and although there was a sense of inevitability that he was going to sing 'A Change is going to come' - he did so with much aplomb.

Not only a play, but a history lesson-well delivered. To conclude-within a month Clay had adopted Islam and changed his name to Muhammed Ali, Brown went on to star in the film 'The Dirty Dozen' and was later to support Ali when he refused to fight in Vietnam.

Malcolm X renounced the Nation of Islam, became a Muslim minister preaching racial integration and disowning racism-was assassinated by members of the Nation of Islam within a year. After X left the Nation of Islam, Muhammed Ali never spoke to him again. When he died Ali said "Turning my back on Malcolm was one of the mistakes I regret most in my life"

By the end of 1964, Sam Cooke was also dead, shot in very strange circumstances in a Los Angeles Motel. Muhammed Ali mourned his friend.

A thoroughly enjoyable play depicting a time of upheaval and change and though there were several historical inaccuracies in the play, this did not deflect on the message, a message that still resonates perhaps even more so now in Trumps' divided America, that change "has been a long time coming".

Neil Kendrick

July 2019: STEPPING OUT

This play by Richard Harris, at the Lace Market Theatre, tells the story of ten people who meet together weekly for a tap dancing class. There is a teacher, a pianist, and a mixed bunch of eight pupils, one of whom is a man. Each one has a personality, and sometimes those personalities clash - for example, when the group is under pressure to perform a display dance at a local charity event, or when a new member, Vera, a controlling figure, joins the class.

Two things in particular stood out for me in this production. One, obviously, is the humour. I was still grinning afterwards when I got off the 25 bus. This was a very witty script - probably the best line being *"It may be February outside, but it's always August under your armpits!"*

And the second thing which stood out was the dancing. At the end of the play, the entire cast, including the pianist, performed two brilliant routines. This was surely a cast of experienced tap dancer, but, during the play, they had to perform the very difficult task of being very inexperienced dancers, not knowing their right from their left, and with little sense of timing. Yes, I know what you're thinking, it's just like Les Dawson on the piano. Takes skill. This play was a wonderful end to the 2018/19 Lace Market season.

Our U3A has supported many high quality performances over the year - and special praise goes to those of you who have managed to find your way to the Theatre for the very first time!

Carolyn Broadhurst.

July 2019: THE LEHMAN TRILOGY

This was our first foray to National theatre Live and what a thrilling experience it was. The newly refurbished Studio 1 at Broadway set us up for our marathon visit, in plush, spacious seats with enough legroom for the tallest of you and your pet pooch. We all settled back in anticipation.

The highly gifted cast of three: Simon Russell Beale, Adam Godley and Ben Miles, didn't disappoint us and wove a lively and believable story of the immigrant brothers' early struggles, loves, entrepreneurial ambition, greed and eventual downfall as simple cotton merchants through to their high flying banking innovation, which was central to the western culture we now find ourselves.

Whilst the set was, on the surface, an unprepossessing square frame set centrally on the stage, the capsule of time moved freely between the cotton store in Alabama to the elegant office of New York and numerous places between. It allowed the three protagonists to share their stories with cleverly crafted twists and shifts to fulfil the other characters in the tale without complicating the simplicity of the production.

The language throughout was poetic, creating a rich and robust story telling which allowed for the pantomimesque characterisations of the sub-characters. The plot flowed easily from their humble beginnings into modern and recognisable times and left us with a lasting sense of wonder and a range of emotions evoked throughout. We were exposed to humour, romance, American history, struggle for survival and an exceptional drama unfolding before us.

It was played to a capacity audience of enthralled theatre goers. Suffice to say, none of us had realised that we had been in the theatre for over 3 hours! Testament both to the outstanding production and the comfortable surroundings.

Coleen Bee

September 2019: ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

Enemy of the People is a play that tells the story of a woman following her conscience and doing what he feels is morally right, despite the negative impact on both her reputation and her family's security. The play portrays a conflict between truth (regardless of cost) against money and control and the length both people and organisations will go to cover up wrong doings.

Henrik Ibsen's original play set in Norway is recreated in this adaptation by Rebecca Lenkiewicz. The adaptation takes on new and sinister overtones in these troubled times of fake news, whistle blowers and a society torn apart by truth, half-truths and downright lies.

Neil Kendrick

September 2019: ONE MAN, TWO GUVNORS

This was a live broadcast from the National Theatre, screened in the luxury of the Broadway's refurbished screen 1. It is based on a commedia dell'arte play written in the Eighteenth Century, about a young man (the truly magnificent James Corden) who ends up as the servant of two masters: the twin sister of his former gangster employer (disguised as her dead brother) and the sister's lover who has stabbed the gangster brother to death. Neither employer can know of the other.

There's obviously a lot of comic potential in the situation and, transformed into a modern version set in 1960s Brighton, it's a riot of fun. The broadcast featured the actors in the original West End run and they gave their all: physical comedy, wordplay, slapstick, clowning, mistaken identities, comic turns and a large cast of comic characters. It was a laugh out loud success.

The play was introduced by a great skiffle band who also played during scene changes. The band was supplemented by actors doing a variety of comic numbers on a glockenspiel, with car hooters and the three female actors performing a creditable imitation of the Andrews Sisters. It was dangerous sitting in the front row too, as members of the audience were invited up, initially to move a trunk but later to become part of the action and ultimately to be drenched by a huge custard pie. It's really worth catching the broadcast if it's ever repeated.

Paul Martinez

OCTOBER 2019: TURANDOT

At the Broadway Cinema, where they have some new very comfortable seats, we went to see a showing of the opera Turandot by Puccini, It was a terrific performance, tremendous singing, the costumes were very beautiful, lots of vibrant colour, and of course, lots of drama. The opera is set in China with Princess Turandot. To win her, love suitors have to solve three riddles; if they fail they are executed by being beheaded. Calaf, the hero, comes along and solves them, but before the happy ever after ending, of course, there is tragedy and loss. It also has one of the best arias in opera the glorious Nessun Dorma. It was sung beautifully and gave me goose pimples. A nice Sunday entertainment.

I would like to thank Paul for putting it together.

Jean Taylor

OCTOBER 2019: MANON

Fourteen of us went to see Manon, a broadcast opera from the Met. This is one of the masterpieces of French grand opera, complete with melodic, enrapturing score, tragic lovers and the traditional feature of French opera, a ballet. The roles of the tragic lovers were brilliantly sung by Lisette Oropesa and Michael Fabiano and there was a real chemistry between them. Several people remarked that the plot was pretty plausible. The production was by legendary designer Laurent Pelly.

Many thanks to Colin who introduced us to the opera before we went.

Paul Martinez

November 2019: THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Wow! What an experience, which took me completely by surprise! Thought it would be a pleasant afternoon, no more or less to see the above. How wrong was I? Most of us know the show well, the songs and the story but this was a humdinger!

It exceeded all expectations, was a totally fresh experience and for me faultless whether it be the singers, the actors, the stage sets, the production, the orchestra – I could go on! I was completely absorbed in the performance, and was moved, as others were, to the occasional tear!

It really was absolutely brilliant, all so utterly believable. The children were enchanting, not to mention Maria. What more is there to say apart from well done Nottingham Operatic and thanks to Ann Porter for being in charge of it all.

I have to say this is one of the easiest reviews I have ever had to write – and I can't wait for their next performance of *Guys and Dolls* in October 2020.

Janet Whitchurch

November 2019: ASSASSINS

Assassins at the Nottingham Playhouse was about a group of individuals in history who try to assassinate the President of the USA. This musical written by Stephen Sondheim reflects upon past assassinations and attempted assassinations of US presidents and turns stories into a fascinating history lesson about the minds of determined obsessives, some more crazy than others - What makes an individual reach for a gun when they feel their voice cannot be heard? This satire is about the power of the President, the lure of celebrity and the failure of the American dream.

Assassins is produced in a vaudeville style yet modern way. It is terrifically performed by an extremely talented cast of actor musicians who give a committed performance throughout. As one put down an instrument, another would pick up and start playing. This musical is still relevant to today's audiences as the theme chimes very much with our politically unstable times. There was so much activity on the stage, featuring a cast of 15 plus instruments. It might not have been everyone's cup of tea but it was clever, funny and thought provoking.

Basia Arch

November 2019: HANSARD

Hansard, the official report of all parliamentary debates, according to the dictionary. Well, this debate was punchy, inciteful, entertaining and relevant, despite being written about parliamentary legislation of 1988.

The audience laughed spontaneously at the irony of the politics, the relationship and the class distinction. We were equally challenged in our beliefs and political leanings, especially in relation to Section 28 of the Ethical Standards in public life.

Whilst the storyline related quite specifically to the Thatcher government and her leadership it was startling to recognise similarities in the political forum of today.

The cast of 2 owned the stage and owned the audience for the duration. With no interval to slow the pace we were all captive to the unravelling of their personal tragedy and relationship breakdown. The hard - hitting satire opened up their personal wounds in sync with the passing of the bill. The juxtaposition of these two events provided a most compelling drama which was enjoyed by all. Highly recommended!

Coleen Bee

November 2019: AKHNATEN

After an introductory talk which I gave to the Opera Study Group 12 of us went to Broadway Cinema to see a relay of Philip Glass's opera Akhnaten from the New York Met. Akhnaten loosely follows the story of the eponymous ancient Egyptian pharaoh, best known for being the father of Tutankhamun and for replacing traditional polytheism (the belief in numerous deities) with the worship of just one god – the sun god Aten.

The story of Akhnaten's rise to power, the erecting of his new capital city and the fall of his dynasty is told in a series of vivid tableaux. The hypnotic minimalist music was accompanied on stage by stylised movement and choreographed juggling, which, far from being distracting, greatly enhanced the power of Glass's score. The production was lavish, as we have come to expect from the Met, with beautiful costumes, striking sets and atmospheric lighting. But star billing must go to the singers and the orchestra, who coped superbly with the demanding music. Special mention must be given to the counter-tenor Anthony Roth Costanzo, who played and sang the challenging title role of Akhnaten so magnificently.

Colin Jones

December 2019: SEASONS GREETINGS

This play was first performed in 1980, but without doubt many parts of it were true today. A farcical comedy about four days in the life of a dysfunctional family starting on Christmas Eve in an average English suburban house.

The general theme is about Christmas being an excuse to gather incompatible people together – (sounds familiar ???!) We have the annually disastrous Christmas meal, fractious children, men avoiding domestic duties (sounds familiar???) – and so it goes on!

Probably the highlight of the show was the Puppet Show with three pigs, which was very well performed.

All in all a pleasant afternoon's entertainment and a play in which I imagine most of us found scenes we could relate to!

Janet Whitchurch

December 2019: Family Carol Concert

Saturday 19th December, went to see the annual Family Christmas Carol Concert at the Concert Hall, had a jolly good evening entertainment lots of lovely carols to sing. The Thoresby Colliery Bass Band played some really great music and the lovely Harmonic Choir sang excellently. There was some fun when the children were invited on the stage to sing and then conduct. It was very funny and lovely to see. All in all it was a very good evening of entertainment.

Jean Taylor

As usual, this concert was a fun, get-you-in-the-mood, Christmas event. There was audience participation, with carols for us all to sing, plus a bit of stamping and clapping. And the children were invited on to the stage for "Away in the manger" and "Jingle Bells", with a couple of them being called upon to try out the conductor's role. One little boy, Joshua, was determined to make the most of his two seconds in the limelight on the Concert Hall platform! Special mention was made at the end of the concert of some swimmers in the audience from Rushcliffe - apparently there were twenty two of them there. Huh, that's nothing! Forty one tickets were bought by our U3A Group!

Carolyn Broadhurst