

FROM DELACROIX ON-LINE

A Model for Modern Fringe Theatre?

Delacroix Fringe Rating: 4 Stars

With the web providing seemingly endless free entertainment, television spewing out reality shows in almost every flavour and Hollywood churning out ever more addictively sexy violent lurid reels, I have to admit to often feeling despondent as to the theatre's prospects as a viable medium for modern entertainment and culture enthusiasts.

The Cock Tavern's production of James Sheldon's new play 'A Model for Mankind' under the feisty, tight direction by Blanche McIntyre and the savvy and artful design and costumes by Lucy Read and Nettie Hall is a beacon of hope for those who think that the theatre is an entertainment and cultural experience with unique potential and sway. This is the first time one of Mr. Sheldon's plays is shown in London. The play itself is a tale of sickening, murderous lovers' tromperie using the bleak, corrupt backdrop of Stalin's and Brezhnev's USSR. The composer Shostakovich, his male and female lovers, his confidante/ doctor and various representatives of the regime engage in a ballet of seduction, betrayal, argument, prosecution and confessions at various moments in time between 1927 to 1980. One leaves the show feeling a little like one does after putting down '1984' by George Orwell, that pinnacle reference in the matter of romantic love torn asunder by political oppression. Can anyone or anything at all truly remain clean in a fetid social and political swamp?

The theatre's tiny space brings out a very raw sense of the unfolding human drama, the rather dashing young cast were compelling and convincing (Shereen Martineau is lovely), the sparing use of a video screen (a la 'History Boys') and the highly deft direction added to the aforementioned qualities resulted in a rather enthralling high pace/ high octane show that was delivered in a way that allowed for the darting around in time, similar changes in locations and crucially for two hours of theatrical entertainment to be delivered pretty breathlessly.

For those who have tired of high budget and lets face it, rather pedestrian bourgeois theatre whose tricks have essentially remained frozen since Moliere's services to Louis the anything, this production of 'A Model for Mankind' thrills, moves and leaves us ponderous.

Pure GREAT modern theatre. Go see it quick.

Anthony Hayden-West