



Adelaide Theatre Guide

www.theatreguide.com.au

Supporting live theatre in South Australia

PO Box 738
MODBURY SA 5092

info@theatreguide.com.au
ABN : 93 297 960 525

EDUCATING RITA

IpSkip Productions

Bakehouse Theatre

Until 14 Jan 2017

Review by Anthony Vawser

The Pygmalion myth is about as durable a basis for stimulating works of theatre as such deathless themes like innocence-to-experience, nature-vs-nurture, art-vs-commerce, pragmatism-vs-idealism, ambition-vs-acceptance. In its own way, this show manages to encompass a-little-to-a-lot of all these ideas, and more besides: the British class system, the consequences of traditional gender roles, the benefits - and limits - of education, the impact of living at the mercy of a stable economy.

In the end, this show works because it's fun without being too fluffy, intelligent without being esoteric – and how could a critic possibly resist a play that pokes such delightful, good-natured fun at the stuffy conventions of academic criticism itself? Of course, in the world of theatre, good texts need to be brought to life and guided to completion by people who know what they're doing; happily, IpSkip Productions have given us a winner for their very first show.

"Educating Rita" was a case of a hit UK theatrical property turning into a worldwide popular success when filmed in 1983, but the necessary adaptations that took place between two essentially different mediums mean that Willy Russell's writing really does have a different impact when seen/heard on the stage - and, in this reviewer's opinion, it's a stronger, more satisfying impact (for one thing, there's no need to have to put up with a dreadful, dated synthesiser score!)

Director/producer Nathan Quadrio has already repeatedly proven his abilities across multiple artistic disciplines: dramatic acting, musical comedy, and as a forthright, insightful critic of others' work. Quadrio's general adeptness with the challenges of a two-character, one-set piece are most impressive, especially for a debut. Keeping the number of variable elements to a minimum is a wise way of easing into the responsibilities of a stage director, but it's a tactic that requires a cast of monumental ability to carry the weight of an entire show on two sets of shoulders.

It is fortunate that Quadrio has engaged the tremendous talents of Lauren Renée and James McCluskey-Garcia; both actors are magnetic and delightful. The dynamism of these two portrayals – aspiring student and jaded teacher – is supremely satisfying, but occasionally has its drawbacks; there are moments when the tiny stage seems barely capable of containing the larger-than-life physical comedy or the drama of a thrown object that seemed to have real potential of landing in the front row's lap!

The only real criticism to be made here is that the piece builds to a peak by the end of Act One, with the character/plot development of the second half never quite as stimulating as the first. This issue was exacerbated on opening night when circumstances threatened to derail the progress of the play; it is a credit to the performers that they collectively managed to get the proceedings back on track and moving right along.

"Educating Rita" is a work that has enough on its mind for an audience to feel that the playwright is both anticipating and valuing their intelligence - but most importantly, it presents us with two interesting characters to guide us through its ideas, providing plenty of opportunity along the way to laugh out loud. That this production is ideally cast, engagingly performed, and smartly directed means that all



Adelaide Theatre Guide

www.theatreguide.com.au

Supporting live theatre in South Australia

PO Box 738
MODBURY SA 5092

info@theatreguide.com.au
ABN : 93 297 960 525

those who couldn't obtain a ticket for this sold-out season will want to keep a close watch on the future exploits of IpSkip.