



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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NELL GWYNN

Stirling Players

Stirling Community Theatre

Until 9 March 2019

Review by Fran Edwards

This play by Jessica Swale takes a look at the life of the first female star of theatre, Nell Gwynn. Even more famous as Charles II's mistress, this is the first time this story has been told from Nell's point of view. The production includes the political intrigue that marked this time in history, but focuses on Nell's loves: Charles Hart, King Charles II, and theatre.

Emily Currie plays the feisty Nell with lots of heart. She is witty, strong-minded but also vulnerable, a performance with depth. As the leading actor and Nell's teacher, Brad Martin is a man captivated by a girl with a strong feeling of self and displays a love and support through her changes. Peter Davies gives Nell's other man Charles II, an understanding portrayal.

The theatre company consists of only male actors (The Kings Men) until the inclusion of Nell. Actor-Manager Thomas Killigrew (Lindsay Dunn), Edward Kynaston, famous for playing women (Dylan O'Donnell), playwright John Dryden (Matthew Chapman) and trainee actor Ned Spiggett (Simon Barnett), all are affected by Nell. She increases the company's popularity much to the delight of all except Kynaston who is displaced.

The interactions of the players create some amusing moments and Dunn and Chapman have good characterization, Barnett has a amusing reactions and O'Donnell plays the superseded Kynaston to the hilt. Kate Anolak makes the most of her comedy as Nell's dresser, especially when they try to get her on stage to replace Nell.

The women of Charles II were all larger than life in their own way; his wife Queen Catherine was played by Karyn Fuller with all her lines in Portuguese, full of fire. Fuller also plays Nell's mother, completely unrecognizable in the role. His current paramour Lady Castlemaine was given a haughty demeanor by Alicia Zorkovic and her replacement Louise De Keroualle (Rose Harvey) both had regal bearing, strong characters.

Other players were Philip Lyneton, suitably servile as Lord Arlington, King's Advisor; Anita Pipprell as Nell's sister; and Rebecca Kemp as a servant. The production was littered with comic lines, all well-delivered under the experienced direction of Megan Dansie. A play with music needs a musical director and Jacqui Maynard did well, as did Rebecca Kemp with the simple but effective choreography.

An interesting play with its roots in actual events, well written and produced. Well worth a look.