

SHOAH

Shoah Company 3

Odeon Theatre

Until June 4

Review by Stephanie Johnson

“Shoah”, a musical about the holocaust, is no “Springtime for Hitler”.

This world-premiering musical is a relentlessly dark exposé of the cruelty of Nazi Germany and the suffering of the Jews. The message is clear: “Everyone should know the shame; they should all know our pain”.

The story, written by Chris Backstrom, holds no surprises. The harrowing and disturbing tales of survivors of the holocaust have been well documented in literature, film and on stage. This musical reveals nothing new as it traces the lives of Jewish people from 1933 to 1945. The lyrics, also penned by South Australia’s Backstrom, are uneven, sometimes deeply moving and sometimes didactic and repetitive.

The power of this musical lies in the hauntingly beautiful score penned by Ian Gale. The orchestra and singers have embraced this music and conveyed its message with such professionalism and feeling that the people and events of the days before, during and after the holocaust are brought to life.

“Shoah” has no big show-time routines that musical audiences have come to expect and love. It communicates through the language of music – the cruelty of the Nazis, the naïve hopes of the Jews, the appalling suffering of the concentration camps and the ability of the human spirit to survive.

This world premiere of “Shoah” is a musical concert rather than a full-scale musical production. The orchestra is situated on the back of the stage with the singers in a semi-circle at the front. Each singer is dressed in black and dons a yellow star or swastika armband to depict their change of roles.

The ensemble cast all sing well, although most struggled to be heard over the brass section of the orchestra on the night. The sound levels of the orchestra and singers need some adjusting.

Strident songs of the Third Reich were handled well by Josh Penley as the Fuhrer, Rod Schultz as Goebbels and the chorus. Penley was particularly outstanding as the Fuhrer singing “The Broadcast”.

Laura White as Miriam, Zac Tyler as Simon and Michelle Pearson as Edith provided a heartrending contrast as the German Jews. White’s renditions of “Love must be enough”, and “The Death of Miriam” were particularly moving, as was Pearson’s version of “Only a Number”.

Black comedy is the closest this production comes to lightening up and a rousing rendition of “A Beauty Queen” sung by Laura Rocconi as Martha with a chorus of women was a welcome respite.

“Shoah” creators and director Richard Flynn have taken a huge risk in staging this pioneering work. Nevertheless it is a risk worth taking if music such as this can shed light on the darker moments of history.