

THEATR SPECTACLE THEATRE

‘SOMEONE ELSE’S SHOES’

Spectacle Theatre on tour

“... a roller-coaster ride - a riveting piece of theatre from director Steve Davis and his team.”

The phrase “cutting-edge” is much overused today, and you’d hardly expect it to be used in a play for schoolkids, but if ever there was an apt description it is for a short sharp piece of theatre currently being presented around South Wales by Rhondda-based Spectacle Theatre.

Someone Else’s Shoes is a savage assault on a lot of the values we hold dear, a provocative undermining of convention. And yet, oddly, it’s based on a fifty-year old American novel that has had a regular place on the school curriculum because it is such a respectable assertion of democratic tolerance.

To Kill A Mockingbird, you may recall (and I suspect a lot of us, including young students, know it from the Gregory Peck film rather than the Harper Lee novel), is about a solicitor who defends a black man accused of raping a white woman in a rural racist Alabama community.

Good old Atticus Finch, a sort of Abe Lincoln figure, has a basic attitude to life: put yourself in other people’s shoes. And Paul Swift’s play asks its young audiences to do just that – but not, perhaps, in the way we’re used to.

Instead of just accepting the apparently radical – or at least radical for the Deep South – motives and actions of Atticus, as relayed to us through the words of his daughter Scout, we are asked to question everything – and, ultimately, whether there is really a happy ending to this moral tale.

Swift does this by the apparently simple device of having a group of Rhondda people – Andrew Turner, a teacher, his children Sion and Rhian and one of his pupils, Jodie – telling and acting out the Harper Lee narrative.

But this group have their own stories, of course, and they aren’t that different from their American counterparts. Andrew, for example, is tolerant, liberal, fair-minded and takes on the role of Atticus with ease – but the key character is Jodie, a disturbed girl who seeks refuge in the Turner house not only because she is being abused by her father but because of a relationship with an Asian boy.

The action takes place in Rhian’s bedroom and the culture is all High School Musical, games, Jamie Oliver, with Jodie an aggressive no-holds-barred teenage outsider in a polite, comfortable, middle-class environment.

What happens is a roller-coaster ride through complex and challenging heady ethical questions about right action and privilege that open up all sorts of issues not just for the 13-plus age group it’s aimed at but for any audience. It’s a riveting piece of theatre from director Steve Davis and his team, with Carys Parry setting the stage alight with the storming performance of her career.

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