

A WONDERFULLY BRAVE WORKING OF TRAGIC TALE

A great deal of thought to all the pros and cons of staging this year's spring production of 'The Diary of Anne Frank' was undertaken by Stage Two Downham Drama Group.

Dramatised by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett from the book 'Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl' the director Fran Osborne, opted to stage this interesting and different play, despite knowing the difficulties that this production demanded, both in directing a cast of 10 and devising a set which depicted an attic, on Downham Village Hall's little stage.

Fran's choice resulted in the wonderfully brave and breathtaking performance of 'Anne Frank's Diary,' which was played to capacity audiences on Friday and Saturday. Everyone was enthralled by her thoughtful and sensitive direction.

The intentions of the playwrights were certainly realised as we watched actors and technicians recreate the stressful times that the Jewish family Frank, and their friends, the Van Daans and Mr Kraler (played by Eddie Bootle), lived through from 1942 to 1945 when Holland was under Nazi occupation.

The entire cast of this play were so well rehearsed and word perfect that they appeared to 'live' their roles rather than merely acting them. This gave an added dimension of belief to this production.

Particular cameos were electrifying, such was the energy generated by Mrs Frank's outburst (played by Glen Purchase) when she caught Mr Vann Daan (David King) stealing the family's bread; the frustration of having to share a bedroom with a teenage girl, by the loner Mr Dussel the dentist (Gerry Purchase); Mrs Van Dann (Elizabeth Wrigley) clinging on to the memories of the comfortable life by nursing her fur coat - and the sweet placating nature of Anne's older sister, Margot (Lucy Scott). Mr Frank, who managed to be a patient father and strong support to them all, was played with compassion by Kim Croydon.

Rachel Humphreys who played Anne shocked the audience by her enactment of Anne's nightmare - and engaged our sweeter memories when feeling longings of love for Peter (Karl Barnsley).

Act one ended with the 'sweet celebration' of Hanukah (Jewish thanksgiving). Even under such historical bittersweet conditions Anne had managed to make gifts for everyone.

Rachel achieved her acting debut with a natural skill and depth of understanding. She caught the nuances of an adolescent girl's high and low spirits, confusions and relationships.

Anne longed for freedom and love while living in that cramped existence - no noise or movement between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.

What a challenging role for Rachel to play at the very onset of her life in the theatre.

She revelled in her performance.

Eight members of the cast played in close proximity on stage throughout the performance, which bonded them in true team effort. Mr Dussel, provided the attic in which the fugitives lived and he and his daughter, Miep Gies (Kate Taylor), played their parts with quiet bravery and warm concern.

Stage manger Aled Brewerton and Don Bradbury stage construction together with the backstage technicians and designers are all to be congratulated for a first class job. Rachel Scott dressed the set assisted by property mistress Stephanie Brewerton.

Lighting and sound was by David Scott and Pat Hargreaves, whose variety of sound effects included low gear noises from below to the crunch of jackboots marching along the street, the climax being the harsh words of 'Raus Schnell' by the Nazi soldier who came to arrest the party from the attic.

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