

Wild at Heart



[Average rating of our reviews]

Four short plays from the pen of Tennessee Williams make for a wonderfully absorbing and evocative evening's theatre thanks to fine acting and directing, and performed in a real gem of a theatre.

Author:

Tennessee Williams

Composer:

Delia Racheru

Director:

Séamus Newham

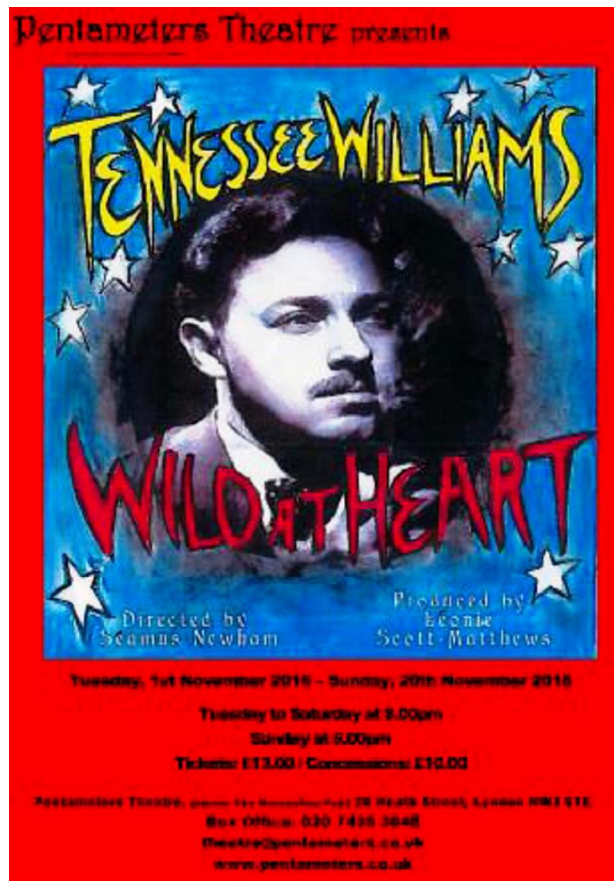


Image: Pentameters Theatre

Pentameters Theatre

28 Heath Street
Hampstead
London
NW3 6TE

Theatre type: London Fringe

Box office tel: 020 7435 3648

Show genre: Drama

Running time: 1 hr 00 mins

Closes: Sunday 20 November 2016

Synopsis

"A prayer for the wild at heart living in cages."

Four one-act plays by Tennessee Williams.

These four short pieces date from Williams' early years as a playwright and are perfect little gems, exploring many of the themes that dominated his best known works.

At Liberty (1939) UK Premiere: a once successful actress retreats to her childhood home in Mississippi with fantasies of resurrecting her career.

Mr Paradise (1941): in a New Orleans book shop a young woman discovers a forgotten book of poetry that changes her life and where her pursuit of its author, the illusive Mr Paradise, leads to an epic battle of wills.

Hello From Bertha (1946): a poetic play about the life and death of a prostitute, Bertha, in a low-class bordello.

Talk To Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen (1952): a young couple bound together in an endless cycle of hopeless poverty, struggle for survival in a dingy hotel-room.

At Liberty and Mr Paradise are two of the 'lost' plays that have only been printed in recent years.

It has been some time since Hello From Bertha and Talk To Me Like the Rain and let Me Listen have been staged.

ActDrop reviews



Peter Brown

Friday 4 November 2016



"Everyone loves Tennessee Williams" says Léonie Scott-Matthews as she warmly welcomes us to her unique, gem of a theatre and introduces this programme of short plays by the famous American playwright.

Ms Scott-Matthews may well be right in her assessment about Williams's continuing popularity with the theatre-going public but, as these works show, it can hardly be because his work generates gales of hilarity or waves of euphoria.

The programme here - which lasts just about 75 minutes - consists of four of Tennessee Williams's plays, some of which haven't had an airing for some time and a couple which have only recently been discovered.

It's an inspired selection, in part because they do all carry the same kind of themes and motifs which connect them, yet the stories are individual too with their own compelling qualities which allow us to experience a variety of situations and empathise with a range of different characters.

And four short plays, strung together without a formal interval, proves an ideal format, ideally paced - we can concentrate on the action for about 15 minutes and then relax for a moment or two to digest what we've seen, before moving on to the next scenario.

Séamus Newham employs a light, natural directorial touch here where the characters are left to speak for themselves through Williams's poetically melancholic dialogue.

But don't confuse lightness of touch with lack of a strong vision - it's evident in spades in fine ensemble acting from a very capable cast, the brilliant selection of music and in John Dalton's commendable set which reflects the faded dreams and aspirations of the characters we meet.

Mr Dalton, though, is more than well-served by the nature of the venue itself.

Sitting next to an old doll's house and surrounded by bric-a-brac all around this lovingly-created theatre - now 48 years young - it rather felt at times as though we (the audience) were actually sitting on the set.

The overall effect is that we feel like flies on the walls of the run-down establishments - a brothel, a hotel, a dingy home in a red-light district - that the characters inhabit.

It's hard to pin-down exactly why these plays are so absorbing, given that they explore disappointment and the brutality of living harsh, unrewarding existences.

I suspect that, as we watch these characters revealing their longing for something better in their lives and yearning to be their real selves, or come to terms with their failures, we find some kind of therapeutic benefit since we've all suffered similar disappointments in our lives when fickle fate has dealt us a shoddy hand or two.

So, even though these plays are sombre, even sad, we don't actually leave the theatre feeling glum or suicidally depressed - in fact, strangely, quite the contrary.

Obviously, Tennessee Williams knew 'a thing or two about a thing or two', especially the human condition.

No wonder his work can still draw crowds.

I'd happily see this production again if only to hear the wonderfully evocative selection of jazz which meets us as we enter the auditorium and oozes through the scenarios like some invisible hand orchestrating and manipulating the proceedings.

But Wild at Heart is not merely about musical bliss - it's a wonderfully absorbing and evocative evening's theatre with fine acting and directing.

Highly recommended.

Other reviews

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