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Theatre: Review - Under Milk Wood at Pentameters Theatre

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by JOSH LOEB

MY, how joyous all words sound in Dylan Thomas's fictional Welsh fishing village of Llareggub (try reading the name backwards).

In the streets under the hilltop Milk Wood, young women are "bridesmaided by glow worms", the nights are "bible black", and "barnacle-breasted" old sailors have "grog-blossomed" noses. Even the names of streets (like Goosegog Lane) and people (like Gossamer Beynon) sound as warm and soothing as a luxurious bath, and director Tom Neill is spot on when he says in the programme notes that Thomas's humane masterpiece is "one of the richest and biggest hearted" of texts.

Pentameters' founder Léonie Scott-Matthews has a connection of sorts with the poet – a regular in the pubs of Fitzrovia and Soho during his boozy days in London – as she was good friends at one time with his daughter, the late Aeronwy Thomas-Ellis.

Under Milk Wood was of course intended as a "play for voices", and its fans might think that nothing could beat reclining in the comfort of your own home and letting the original 1954 BBC radio recording with Richard Burton's muscular narration consume you.

But incredible though it may seem, this new adaptation, which comes with an original score by Mr Neill, manages to add another dimension to this classic tale of the day in the life of a village. It will, by turns, move you to melancholy and lift your spirits like a spring morning.

The five-strong cast (Thomas Heard, Ali Kemp, Deborah Klayman, narrator Davies Plamer and Mr Neill himself) sing and play instruments, as well as acting out multiple roles.

They do it all beautifully No wonder some who have experienced this say it is one of the best shows they have ever seen at Pentameters. It leaves your head swimming with wordplay like the seas around Llareggub bristling with fish that can "come biting out" of the briny depths and nibble a man "down to his wishbone".

A treat of a production in one of the most intimate venues around.

Go and see it.

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