

CHATTERBOX REVIEW

Revelations of man's inhumanity to man, when filtered through the eyes, heart, mind and words of a child are often the most gripping and least forgettable. The evangelizing oratory or sweeping prose of adults is no match for the wide eyed piercing accuracy of the diary of a struggling adolescent.

The diary of Anne Frank, first published in late 1947, has been rocking the world since. Re-enactments of that unfathomable episode in human history have riveted stage and screen audiences and the diary has rightly remained staple fare in international public educational systems. Its timely, eternal and universal messages must never be silenced or forgotten.

Jon Tracy and his wonderfully talented ensemble, in a powerful adaptation of the diary and a collection of Anne's short stories, know and feel this. In commissioning the remarkably artistic, tightly crafted production, Chatterbox, Missouri Street Theatre again recognizes and nurtures enormous talent. Artistically, educationally, and morally, attendance may well be a civic duty.

Chatterbox takes us as guests through the psyche and soul of young Anne, the budding woman, the tumultuous pre teen, the dutiful polite daughter, the frightened Jew and the irrepressible dreamer and self nurturer as she spends 2 years secreted away with 7 other people.

Tracy makes ample use of his signature penchant for dramatic physical and metaphysical metaphors. These are often expressed through sudden and at times robotic choreography, and mantra like intonations from the cast cleverly assuming the role of a quasi Greek chorus narrating, setting the tone and keeping the rhythm of the play while mediating the physical space separating audience and actor.

One of the Chorus' petitions' for our attention is the repetitive utterance of seemingly random numbers. Are these numbers war days, days of seclusion, casualties of innocents, faceless legions of apathetic frightened civilians looking the other way, wave upon wave of Jews tortured and murdered, or perhaps, the stenciled stench of Aryan supremacy tattooed on the skin of millions interned in concentration camps? Powerful stuff

We all know how the story ends, but Chatterbox is about the personal process of fear, the sanctuary of imagination, and captivity and persecution; both Anne's, her fellows in hiding and yours, the audience and world citizens.

Using unaccented plain English drives home the message that we must all be guardians at the gate against those who would be God as well as those who sit by idly while such demons are crowned with an ill-gained richness of human suffering. Ensemble members (Terry Boero and Angelique Wilkie) played different roles assuming broadly divergent personalities instantly, seamlessly and superbly. Although the fathers' role is not a focus, Michael Glynn carries it off credibly. Dorian Sammartino capably handled the roles of younger males and recurring archetypes of Aryan supremacy and callous cowering apathy. This

was tough stuff and volume and speed was frequently substituted for passion, pathos and intensity. Nonetheless, the essence of a believable message was delivered in spades.

Lyndsy Kail (Anne Frank) met the challenge of exploring the wide ranges of adolescence while shouldering the entire production. At only 17, she delivered a strong and almost flawlessly believable portrayal of the eternal conflict of raging hormones, surging unbridled creativity, childlike wonder and whimsy and teenage angst. The ensemble showed superb pacing, no dead spots and was always in character. Non verbal communication, the toughest and most telling type of discourse, was superb.

Minimized sets and scenes maximized physicality, dialogue and interaction. Just as with rats, all the tunnels and toys in the world do not change the reality of a caged existence. Set walls were as those used to deport Jews. The filtered light of the set gave ample home to fear in the shadows.

In a fascinating discussion, Jon stated ... “we present them (the audience) pictures and they decide how to feel about them... we are docents to a museum of images that show things but you decide to look at whatever images you wish”

Could this production improve? The real issue is to get this production, appropriately toned and paced, out to every K-12 student in the county. Get a grant, show the school boards and use Solano College Theater. Write a brief historical and script guide and narrate before and facilitate a chat after. Tune up the transparency of the metaphors and tune in the audience a bit more to the powerful meanings of the chorus, numbers and dream sequences. Saying any more, well, that just gives away the sizzle as well as the steak.

Thank you, Missouri Street Theater, thank you Mom and Dad Tracy and Solano Actors Training Program (Jon’s a grad), thank you cast and crew and thank you, Jon

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