

# National Theatre

## new connections

### Show Report 2008

#### COMPANY INFO

Company	The Pump House Youth Theatre
Play	A Vampire Story
Director	Moya Brewer and Karen Rhodes
Partnership Theatre	NORTHAMPTON Royal and Derngate
Show reporter	Max Key

#### COMPANY

The organisation behind the performance was excellent and Moya Brewer and Karen Rhodes were great hosts. On arrival at the venue I was greeted by students and staff and felt very welcome at what seemed a very warm, open, creative and friendly environment. Very professional administration - Company, Creative Team, The Writer and NT Connections clearly labeled on the programme.

The company were a delight to meet, full of energy and really proud of their production. They enthusiastically told me of how they had started the project as a group of individuals and finished it as a big family and it was easy for me to believe them. All of them seemed to want to tell of their personal journeys, some of being shy and now having confidence and forming a family of friends from the production.

It seemed as though the company, Moya and Karen had much of the support they required, they were allowed access to all facilities of the theatre and had had a good team of helpers around them including a great Stage Crew! Other members of the Youth theatre from several different departments had also helped wherever possible.

#### VENUE

The Pump House Theatre is a terrific theatre with a good playing size space to accommodate both the group and more intimate scenes very well. The theatre seats around 300 people and was a warm, comfortable space. The directors had chosen that the audience would sit end-on and so the whole audience had a similar view of the production. Furthermore, it was great to see both a young and old audience all engrossed and engaged in the production.

#### CASTING

Excellent casting. There were strong performances throughout. The company aged from 12- 17 and they were a good blend of young people from all social backgrounds.

#### PROCESS

To their credit the group often had to rehearse on Sundays and during half term and out of school hours. During rehearsals they spent lots of time on understanding the text and making decisions about what the symbolic meanings of the play were. Furthermore, emphasis on creating strong believable characters by 'Hot Seating' and improvisation were crucial to the process.

Additionally, the use of props to help the group discover their characters and personal traits was often employed.

In the group discussion I discovered that the group went to see 'A Woman in Black' and 'Theresa Raquin' which they said was a great inspiration for their own production.

#### STAGING

Moya Brewer and Karen Rhodes made great use of the space, with performers entering from all areas of theatre including through the aisles of audience and both sides of the stage. The play was staged very well and aided the complexities of the story which were made very clear on stage. The staging and scene changes were achieved through a fantastic stage crew team who worked so hard at bringing on the set, furniture and any other props needed on and off-stage. My only reservation to this was that there could have been more economical choices made with the amount of furniture and set needed and resulted in the play moving not quite as swiftly and fluently along. However, there were many beautiful theatrical moments and so many clever uses of theatrical devices including: gauze effects, lighting and some fantastic video footage of the train journey.

#### TEXT

The cast handled the text with ease and it was immediately apparent that they had all grasped the meaning of the story very well and had understood all its complexities and layers. Furthermore, not only as performers had they all embodied the language they were also beginning to make the text their own and have ownership over the play which was a joy to watch.

#### PERFORMANCE

The performance was wonderful. A terrific and vibrant piece, well thought out and ambitiously staged. The play began fantastically with an atmospheric and ghostly image of a woman framed in a golden picture frame. Additionally, the classroom scenes were excellent, very funny and brilliantly observed.

The performances from the actors were also very impressive, Niamh Brewer playing Eleanor was excellent at guiding the audience through the story. Tom Jordan was equally good as Moon and all the actors' relationships were believable and they had created a good dynamic between them on stage. In fact, the cast were extremely strong throughout and it was great to see the play working with such a large ensemble company. The Food technology scene was also terrific and it was a nice touch that the cast were unified in red aprons!

A special note must also go to all the cast for a fantastic dance/choreographic scene and some spectacular break dancing from members of the cast. Also, the bar scene that followed was very well acted by Adam Webster and Lauryn Murdoch.

Technically, the cast were on cue with their dialogue and the script was lifted nicely off the page making it a very enjoyable evening.

#### DESIGN

The set and costumes were incredibly ambitious and there had been much attention made to this aspect of the production.

All the cast on stage were dressed both in modern and great period costumes used for the show and you could tell that the company had all pulled together to create the large amount of costumes necessary for the production to work.

The lighting was slightly over ambitious and although in areas it caught the mood and essence of the play it was a bit chaotic and jerky. If more attention had been made to the lighting this in many ways would have completed what was a terrific piece of theatre. There were some lovely touches however but the blackouts weren't really necessary and slowed the pace of the production down.

The sound used in this production was very good and added to the mystical element of the play. The soundscape was sometimes too loud and slightly detracted from the action on stage.

#### AUDIENCE

A packed audience with a lovely range of people of mixed age, gender and race.

#### HEALTH & SAFETY

Excellent. Clearly labeled Fire Exits around the theatre.