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Double Bill: Magical Chairs and There's Only One Wayne Lee - Southwark Playhouse, London

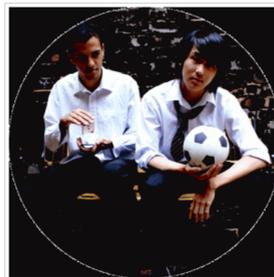
Posted by: The Public Reviews in Drama 04/09/2011 Comments Off

Writer: Mary Mazzilli and Roy Williams.

Director: Jonathan Man

Reviewer: Lettie Mckie

The Public Reviews Rating: ★★★★★



These two plays directed by Jonathan Man could not have been more different. The first, *Magical Chairs* by Mary Mazzilli was frankly terrible. A stilted, at times unintelligible script played out awkwardly by actors whose attempts at physical theatre were well meaning but feeble. Billed as an 'experimental' and 'compelling' play that looked at society's attitudes towards youth and multiculturalism this play failed to deliver any of its promises. The main premise of the play was the tired dystopian cliché of an unknown room, a locked door and two increasingly sinister characters waiting for an unknown fate. When done properly, this well heeled formula can send a shiver down an audience's spine and gets them to question their life, their world and their reality. Unfortunately in this play the ending was so obvious and the characters' behaviour so predictable that the only reaction was an awkward boredom that set in after about ten minutes. A confused metaphor about abandoned chairs did nothing to improve a play that seemed to go nowhere and say nothing. Little chemistry, lack of pace, and at time incoherent delivery of cringe worthy lines made the whole performance excruciatingly embarrassing to watch.

After such an inauspicious start however, the second play 'There's only one Wayne Lee' by Roy Williams was refreshingly simple and entertaining. Performed by the same actors (Alexandre Ross and Chris Chan), it told a charming 'coming of age' story about two football mad boys growing up in the newly emerging multi-cultural Britain of the 1970s. What was most surprising about this second performance was that it became clear after about five minutes that the actors were actually quite good. In *Magical Chairs*, they had mostly shouted at each other in strange affected accents and moved around the stage like marionettes, but in the second play their characterisations and chemistry was much more apparent, natural and believable. The story was about Wayne Lee (Chan) a Chinese pupil at an inner city state school who longs to be good at football and idolises the school champion Carl Wilkins (Ross), who is of afro-Caribbean descent and is about to get signed by Chelsea FC. The story required both actors to play multiple roles, which they took on with aplomb, changing their accents and physiognomy seamlessly to deliver convincingly witty performances: Alexandre Ross was particularly good here. After the horrendous 'mad magician' voice that he had adopted for the first play it was an unexpected pleasure to see and believe his changes from the arrogant footballer leader of the school Carl Wilkins, to the weedy posh boy Oliver, Wayne Lee's geeky best friend.

The second play was too long and lukewarm in parts but infinitely better than the first. It was a success because of its simplicity, a story that appealed because it was recognisable to real life, not trying to be clever. The actors were so much more comfortable away from the verbiage and ill thought out concepts of the first play and therefore their talents for storytelling and characterisation eventually shone through.

Runs until 3rd September



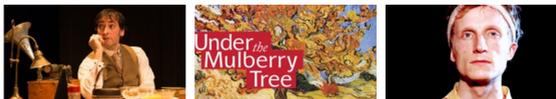
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Previous: The Beasts (Las Brutas) – Theatre 503, London Next: WHAT'S HOT – 5th September 2011

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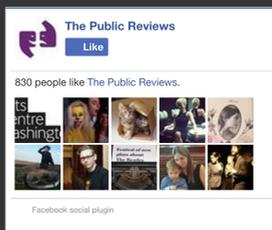
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