The Importance of Being Earnest

On October 7th much laughter and applause filled the Wells Theatre with the opening production of the season, the Importance of Being Earnest. A cast of nine, consisting of a mixture of non-experienced and veteran performers, graced the wells stage to a nearly full house on opening night. The show posses a number of underlying messages many dealing with marriage and what goes on when we think no one else is looking. The performers had about four months put on the production directed by student director Kat Kohbel. In addition, the show is full of wonderfully interesting characters that help to satirize the hilarious story written by playwright Oscar Wilde. In my opinion, each performer brought a certain life to the production that helped the audience appreciate the quality of the show.

First of all, the show was successful on a number of different aspects. From set construction, simple lighting design, and performances by the cast, the show definitely got the job done. Set designer Doug Rankin definitely made conscious decisions in accordance with the director that assisted the overall look and feel of the show. One aspect I felt the production lacked was in the costume design. Many of the costumes were not either appropriate for a certain character or the time period. For example, Cecily’s dress in the show is said to be, “sadly plain”. In this particular production, Cecily’s dress was anything but plain. In my opinion it was almost gaudy. I also did not agree with the wig choice that was given to the character of Cecily. I almost felt it could’ve been distracting for the audience, and took away from the true beauty of the performer,
Lindsay Markel. I feel that the audience should see Cecily just as beautiful as Algernon does and I don’t think the wig was useful in these terms. In addition, some of the suits had almost a twenties American feel to them rather than late 1800’s Britain. Not to create the idea that I viewed the costumes as a complete disaster, I just felt they missed the mark a bit and did not stand up to other aspects of the production.

Second of all, most of the performers in the show had a good sense of who their characters were and where they were going in terms of development. One performance that stood out was that of Johanna Elkana who portrayed the Role of Aunt Augusta. Every physical movement and decision that was made by Johanna assisted to who she wanted her character become. You had an idea of who her character was the minute she walked on stage. Her gestures, facial expressions, and eye contacted gave the audience a sense of what Aunt Augusta wanted to achieve. Aunt Augusta can often be played a bit more stiff and subtle, but Johanna brought life and energy to the character in which I feel was essential for Monmouth’s audience to receive in terms of a performance. By what Johanna did externally we had a great sense of what she was thinking internally. This is something that is very difficult for actors to achieve and Johanna completely hit the mark.

Two other noteworthy performances in the show are that of Lindsay Markel and Ellen Eherenhardt. Both of these actresses brought true life their characters and were well received by the audience each night. The judicature of our show from Bradley University stated that both of these actresses played these characters genuinely and acted inside the comedy and action of the show rather than standing outside of their characters poking fun at them. This comment summed up why both Eherenhardt and Markel gave stellar performances and were favorites among the audience. Watching Gwendolen and Cecily
being played so genuinely in terms of external and internal action made them so ridiculously hilarious that we couldn’t help but laugh at them. Vocal quality is something that I feel was developed well in bringing out the characters of both Cecily and Gwendolen. Both performers used different intonation and emphasis on what they said. Ellen was more stern and flighty in her voice, and Lindsay provided Cecily with a more naïve young girlish vocal tone. This once again helped give us a sense of who these characters were and read well among the audience.

In order for this show to work for the audience, we as performers had to know who characters are truly were and had to justify every decision made. As Dr. Wallace always states in beginning acting class, the audience can read the script to learn the story. In order for them to see a quality storytelling performance we had to do more than just say the lines. We had to know what this show was truly trying to do. The show has a variety of underlying messages and each character emphasized certain messages. We developed a variety of relationships with other characters in the show and had to determine where these relationships and character traits were going to go.

One particular character decision I had to make was whether or not Algernon truly loved Cecily. Not every character decision an actor makes is going to come quickly or easily. In this instance I couldn’t find the internal action that I needed to develop. This was a problem because I couldn’t develop my external actions without knowing how I actually felt about Cecily. After long contemplation I decided that in the beginning Algernon loved Cecily for all the wrong reasons, but eventually loved her for what he thought was true love. I know that Michael Heaton who played Earnest had a problem with finding the internal action between him and Gwendolen. In the end both Heaton and
I eventually made conscious decisions on the matter, and I feel and hope they were effective for the audience.

Overall I feel this production of *The Importance of Earnest* was effective on all levels of production including character development from the actors. Without quality external and internal character development the audience can not receive the true meaning of the show. There is so much you can do with a character, and as a performer you must make a conscious and firm decision on physical and emotional qualities of who your character really is. On these terms I feel the Monmouth’s production was a success. I feel the audience had somewhat of an understanding of who each character was and what they wanted to achieve. Without these goals and objectives established the production wouldn’t have been the success it was.