

Children of Eden

Crediton Operatic Dramatic Society : CODS
Queen Elizabeth School, Barnfield site, Crediton
Friday 14th April

Director – Heather Barlow

Musical Director – Allan Fouracre

Choreography – Holly Harris, Heather Barlow, Michelle Glover

Ballet Choreography – Erin Zorlu

With music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by John Caird, this was a brave choice of show by CODS. From the writer of “Wicked”, Children of Eden, it can be said, is not to everyone’s taste, although many of the individual songs have become very popular. This show has a challenging score and lends itself to a large company, offering speaking and singing roles for both adults and children. It is an account of The Creation in Genesis and follows through to the story of Noah who is chosen by God to build an ark to save humanity and the animals of the earth.

As the audience entered the auditorium they were greeted with an innovative and beautifully created set. I need to make the point that CODS backstage and production team have to transform a school hall into Eden and this was impressively created with a stunning 3D Tree of Knowledge, clever use of hundreds of footprints on the flooring and the impressive use of blues, pink, yellows and purple to light the set. With pansy painted benches, huge murals on either wall showing space and planets and two screens which were used throughout to give the audience an added perspective of the story, the show began. As if witnessing the beginning of creation, the company enter using individual bright lights as sparks of life from the universe.

The strength of this show is in the story telling, with a need for strong roles from young performers and the more mature and experienced members, if any of the audience have doubts on entering, they should feel fully informed on leaving the theatre.

There were some outstanding principal performances, as you would expect from this society, with good characterisation and powerful vocals creating a very emotional atmosphere. The actor playing Father portrayed the character with the command and authority required of this role, with a strong baritone voice he produced a professional and polished performance. I must also make special mention of the actor playing Eve/Mama Noah who, with a stunning voice of real quality and a natural actress, wowed the audience with her performance of ‘The Spark of Creation’ in Act 1 and then a superb, bluesy ‘Ain’t it good’ with the rest of the company in Act 2. Wow! She was ably supported by the actor playing Adam/Noah and the children of Noah. The portrayal of the conflict between Cain and Abel, their love as brothers and their characterisations were well acted. Both these actors have lovely voices and an instinctive acting ability.

Children of Eden is the story of creation which could not be told without children. All of the young members of the chorus were visibly enjoying being part of the production. Constantly acting and reacting throughout, and performing to the audience in the round, not easy, but perfected by these junior members of the cast. I particularly loved the chorus members sitting amongst the audience whilst the story unfolded. Special mention must be made to Erin Zorla’s beautifully choreographed and performed ballet as the dove and to the actor playing the naughty bird, constantly ‘cawing’ at the audience!

The actors depicting the children of Noah were commendable especially when dealing with the exclusion of Yonah due to her being from the ‘House of Cain’. The love story between Yonah and Japeth was gorgeously acted and, with a stunning rendition of

'Stranger to the Rain' into the duet 'Whatever Time We Have', the audience witnessed a meaningful portrayal of a love denied by prejudice.

Congratulations to the wardrobe team. Great decision to dress everyone in denim of some form and the leads to be in white, simple but effective. The animal masks used by the junior chorus and the ethereal costumes of the snake and her ladies were super. The added colour to the principals' costumes in Act 2 was inventive. The Ark in Act 2 was, again, built specifically for this production. A uniquely constructed lighting rig, cubed shaped and positioned over the round stage and audience allowed the lighting crew to produce a clever lighting plot. The orchestra, in the capable hands of Allan Fouracre, and with a demanding score were spot on throughout and complimented the performers due to an expert sound operator. As I said, this was a brave choice but it paid off. Well done to CODS for bringing this story to the stage in such a colourful and enjoyable form. I congratulate the director, Heather Barlow for her ingenuity and originality.

Lyn Burgoyne

Noda Representative (Mid and East Devon)