

Theatre Review

November 11, 2018

Regular readers will know I like all sorts of theatre, which does not mean I like it all, although it must be said that I mostly do as I choose what I see.

I would love to see much more but my circumstances prevent this as living in a regional area means first travelling to Sydney and recently to Melbourne.

I will be returning to Melbourne in January for my annual tennis visit and will be seeing Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, which is already booking until December next year.

Some shows are just great for their genre and I just sit back, relax and enjoy as I did with A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder in Melbourne. It is a musical of the famous old film Kind Hearts and Coronets and in this Production Company (a Melbourne institution) show the main murderous characters (eight of them) were played by the amazing Mitchell Butel.



Butel, who is currently everywhere, also directed a big production of Candide at the Opera House Concert Hall. It is a famous show with music from Leonard Bernstein and is based on the novel by Voltaire about optimism and looking for the "best of all possible worlds".

This production had a top-class cast with the orchestra conducted by Brett Weymark and the 400-strong Sydney Philharmonia Choir providing moments of sheer bliss.

I had taken friends who did not know the show and their appreciation of it added to my own joy. There are so many highlights but Cunegonde's aria is always one.

Evita at the Sydney Opera House continues the tradition of Opera Australia producing a musical each year. It is a money spinner for them and next year they are doing West Side Story twice. The first on the harbour and then as part of their main program. I am pleased to see it is a new production as I prefer to see our own designers being given this opportunity.

Evita is one of Andrew Lloyd Webber's better musicals. Despite this it still has his signature structure of having a musical theme playing over and over, in this case Don't Cry for me Argentina. Tina Arena is brilliant. She has come a long from Tiny Tina in Young Talent Time. I always find it extraordinary that the events portrayed happened in my lifetime. I have visited Buenos Aires and seen the bullet holes in the buildings and the grandmothers who march every Thursday to remember the children who were stolen.

Contemporary Dance never ceases to impress me with its beauty and sheer physicality of the dancers. I have followed the Sydney Dance Company since it started with Graeme Murphy and now Raphael Bonachelo.

They seem to get better every performance and this last show Forever and Ever surprised even more than ever. The first half, Frame of Mind, was choreographed by Bonachelo, with live music provided by the Australian String Quartet, and then the extraordinary techno Forever and Ever, choreographed by Antony Hamilton with music by his brother Julian Hamilton, costumes by Paula Levis and lighting by Benjamin Cisterne. Along with the brilliant dancers, these creatives gave us a fun and amazing performance.

At the beginning of the month, I had a Belvoir weekend. First, I saw An Enemy of The People by Melissa Reeves after Henrik Ibsen. This is the story that was the basis for the film Jaws: a shark causes panic with some sensible people calling for the resort beach to be closed while the town leader decides to hide the fact as it will close down the place. Those calling for the closure are considered "the enemy".

In this production, the mayor (Kate Mulvany) wants to close down the spa that creates the most income for the town because it has become toxic. The opening scene in the second act is a town meeting that involved the audience superbly.

Downstairs the excellent Zahra Newman delivered a 45-minute monologue Random about a day in the lives of a Caribbean English family. The ordinary day of the mother, father, son and daughter is changed dramatically by a random incident.

Meanwhile, the Sydney Theatre Company presented a gender-reversed production of Dario Fo's Accidental Death of an Anarchist. The role reversal worked to emphasise the absurdities in the farce. The Hayes Theatre continued its presentation of neglected musicals with Meet Me In St Louis, based on the movie of the same name. The reading was great fun but the only really good songs were those from the film.

Each year I try to get to Melbourne twice. I always like the opportunity to see some theatre that is specifically Melbourne in style. This aim was spoiled somewhat by a very poor musical Madiba, but The Gentleman's Guide was great and the last of this year's Production Company shows. Sydney does not have a similar company but we do have "The Hayes".

The Malthouse, which often presents shows with Belvoir, presented Trustees, which starts with a board meeting discussing changes to arts funding recently announced by the government. It then developed into something completely different and included some really soft audience involvement. It was provocative, funny and challenging, and very enjoyable.

But the show that has remained with me since I saw it was at La Mama, which recently burnt down and this played at their Courthouse venue. One and The Other was part of the Victorian Seniors Festival. Debra Batten and Sue Broadway became friends while working for Circus Oz, where Sue was one of the founders.

They use slapstick and their circus skills to highlight what happens to older women. After making a few mistakes as they try to have a cup of tea and proceed to apologise over and over again, they then tell their back stories really exposing themselves.

Sue does her story with a narrative about her family. I found this so moving as I knew Sue, her brother and her parents. Deb tells her story using a succession of T-shirts she is wearing each representing a show in which she has performed from all over the world.

She starts as a very big person and eventually strips to the woman she is today. There is no way I can do justice to this amazing, beautiful, funny and very personal show. They move on to a series of "F... yous" to people who have hurt and abused them. This was the highlight in a show full of them. Then having stripped away all pretensions they literally strip and walk off stage. I am still thinking about it weeks later. Thanks Sue, thanks Deb and thanks Teresa Blake for the beautiful musical support.

Frank Barnes is retired and really looking forward to this year's Wharf Review