

New Shoes Theatre Company

Cockpit Theatre
20.11.12

Review by a member of the Phoenix Group Westminster London

For anyone unable to attend this performance.

The piece, *Hurried Steps*, written by Dacia Maraini, staged by the New Shoes Theatre Company, was performed by a cast of 3 women, 2 men, all professional actors.

The Cockpit theatre auditorium affords an intimate setting, with audience slightly raked on three sides of the playing area, the informal bench style seating adding to the intensity of the piece, the audience experience—up close and personal.

The stage was bare, apart from 5 chairs spaced in a straight line against black tabs, in front of which were placed 5 large black music stands with a script resting on each.

The house lights dimmed, the actors walked on, in plain smartish every day clothes, accompanied by mid European folk type music. Spotlights lit each actor against the black sombre curtains, marking, delineating each actor's individual working space on stage. This was similar to having a row of 5, TV style news readers standing in front of me all ready to tell me their story.

The minimal staging allowed the actors to focus on the content of the piece, without the distractions of any glitzy scenery and props etc. This style of presentation, acted reportage, allows for the direct transmission of the profound, difficult, complex and uncomfortable issues raised. Core issues of human suffering around the world were on display, namely harm caused to women and children by men.

The scripting of this work was excellent, the vocabulary pared, and stark, striking emotional chords within me repeatedly.

The cast took us through the streets, towns and villages of Europe, Africa and the United Kingdom, performing a series of vignettes. The very skilful use of accents leading the audience to each destination filled the stage with their sights and aromas, the scenes of harm, and crimes.

Each vignette started with an introduction, in character, the actor stepped forward,

“ My name is.....and I live with my brother in the house, I am thirteen. My brother owes money to a loan-shark. He was unable to pay his debt with money, so instead, he sold my virginity, against my will, forcing me to comply, while his creditor raped me.

My name is..... my family all live together. My parents live by their religious beliefs, strictly enforcing punishments on us if we do wrong. My older sister must be the first to marry, but I am in love. I watch him, wait for him every day, I'm sure he loves me too. Then one day he asked me to.....

I knew why I felt so ill, and despite trying my best to hide my pregnancy, mother howled, and snarled at me—
“ Your Pregnant “ This harrowing story continued, describing the use of petrol and matches to inflict harm.

Other stories included the sexual trafficking of under-age girls, mercy killings, beatings, abuse and torture, all Human Rights issues. Some of these countries have little or no support mechanisms for victims of these atrocities. Seemingly, the women and young girls suffer in silence, with physical wounds, and torturous mental health conditions.

The psychological harm can significantly impair and reduce the victims future quality of life. This domestic abuse often has long-lasting, devastating affects not only the woman/male victim, but includes any in-vitro pregnancies, new-borns, siblings, immediate family, friends and all relationships.

The epilogue got to me, my eyes started to blur with a few gentle tears—tears of despair, as I personally reached out to all peoples, of all nations who are hurting, today, right now, through no fault of their own.

This performance sought to inform, to say this is what abuse is, and how it occurs in all societies. The audience were left free to reflect on its content without being swayed in any particular political direction.

While listening to the vivid storytelling of these horrific events, I was overwhelmed by the enormity of the subject matter, and thought, what can I do to help ?

Where do we all start helping—Internationally, politically, financially? Through education, crime prevention, social enrichment programmes?

I don't have the answers to these enormous issues, but I am moved to help someone, somewhere recover/refrain from abuse.

Please, Please support this Theatre Company in any way you can !

Thank you—respectfully

RW