

THEATER

Our Country's Good crosses race, gender boundaries

Andrew Mayer
Freelance Reporter

A toast to Australian Day was given on the evening of Jan. 26, as the Robinson Theatre hosted Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*.

Our Country's Good is a play based on the story of British penal settling of Botany Bay, Australia in 1788. Many convicted British prisoners and defeated Royal Officers from the Revolutionary War with America were sent down under to set up camp.

The fictional/non-fictional characters of this play are based on recovered diaries' accounts of the period and an adaptation of Thomas Keneally's novel *The Playmaker*.

Director Michael Phillips interpreted Wertenbaker's script with a focus on the costumes by Carey Hanson and Rebecca Utz as the major vehicles for transition and continuity.

Brechtian influences were seen as actors changed from modern casual wear to period costumes on stage. Gender and cultural roles were crossed and identified by the costumes the actors wore.

Moreover, in a time of limited government

THEATER REVIEW

Our Country's Good

Lord Leebrick Theatre Co.

Written by: Timberlake Wertenbaker
Playing until Feb. 10

★★★

funding of arts and humanities through the National Endowment of the Arts and the National Endowment of the Humanities, there are striking similarities between the limited artistic concern for the Botany Bay civilization from Britain, and current day American art being put on the back burner by our conservative led House of Representatives.

This is a timely play.

On occasion, the audience responded emotionally to the acting. Justin Devanzo's character Robert Sideway learned the art of acting and initially the audience laughed. Although in later, potentially humorous scenes, the laughter was missing or was at the wrong moments.

The actors stretched the tempo beyond the

elasticity of both the play's era and the audience's patience.

I enjoyed the classical music selected by Ryan Webber and I would have enjoyed it more if it was exclusive of the hobnob of additional modern pieces.

The costumes were enough to remind the audience of the universality of the theme.

The tan to brown monotone stage design, by Paul Dustrand, was minimalistic and called for most of the action to take place near the audience. The massive half-a-boat-hull structure on stage right placed the action down stage of it, as co-actors looked on from above.

The overall theme of the play was that theater can help civilize people without individual, gender, race, class or time barriers.

I did receive that message, and I do see the need for more focus on the NEA and NEH controversy. More directors need to choose such plays and more theaters need to include such notices in their programs.

The play continues on Feb. 1-3 and 9-10 with a special matinee performance Feb. 4 at 2 p.m. to benefit Head Start of Lane County. For more information, call 346-4191.

Bed of Roses combines sappy plot with realistic characters

Jesse Bohrer-Clancy
Columnist

Three stars.

Okay, I'll admit it. When I went in to see *Bed of Roses*, I was expecting sappy massive quantities. We're talking taping-a-forest-of-maple-trees-in-late-Vermont quantities of sap here. Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl again, all that crap.

Yes, *Bed of Roses* was all that, but with a bit of a twist. You see, both characters were portrayed as real people with, yes, real problems.

Mary Stuart Masterson is Lisa, your basic neurotic, driven corporate stiff who has nothing in her life but her work, her clod of a boyfriend and her fish. But the fish just took a trip to see Davey Jones' locker.

Needless to say her life appears to be seriously lacking any sort of emotion, particularly love. The two inch corpse floating upside down in the fish bowl is the last straw. The facade falls away and she falls

CINEMA REVIEW

Bed of Roses

Directed by: Michael Goldenberg
Starring: Mary Stuart Masterson and Christian Slater

★★★

apart. Lisa then gets an amazing arrangement of flowers the next day - with no note. Her friend (Pamela Segall) didn't send them and it "hadn't occurred" to the twit she's been dating.

Being the neurotic that she is, she tracks down the florist who delivered them, Lewis (Christian Slater), in a library.

He won't tell her who sent them and her neuroses won't let her accept it. Hence she stewes all night and finally figures it out.

Lisa then spends the day with Lewis traveling around Manhattan, delivering flowers and almost catches herself having a good time. Lewis takes her up to

his apartment to show her an incredible roof top garden that he's cultivated.

In her mind this is just way too much. Here is this guy - nice, sensitive, compassionate, etc. So naturally she kisses him, wigs out, and runs out the door, leaving Lewis wondering "what the hell did I do?"

Lisa then begins to receive deliveries of her favorite roses every hour on the hour. Is that enough sap for you? That's just how the film starts, and just from that, I'd probably puke too. But this film is more than the sum of its parts.

Writer-Director Michael Goldenberg instills the film with an intelligence and integrity that goes beneath the surface of just your basic love story. Both characters are seriously flawed, be it by tragedy or by other things either within or beyond their control.

And the cinematography. Never before have I seen Manhattan look so beautiful on film

by any filmmaker. Bleak, hip, film noir, modern gothic sure, but beautiful? Never. There's simply not that much to work with and a dirty, crime infested urban island that isn't exactly romantic by any means.

Masterson gives a wonderful performance that carries the film. Every emotion, no matter how subtle, shows on her face. She almost says more just with a look than by opening her mouth.

You see, Lisa has the problem of not being able to accept someone else's love. Sound crazy? It's not, it's very real and Masterson portrays it magnificently.

Slater also gives a fine show because he looks like he's finally trying to drop that Jack Nicholson impersonation he always does and finally act a bit.

If you're a cynic, stay away from this film like the plague, you'll waste six bucks and hate it. But if you're still a bit of a romantic in this bleak world, give it a try, it may just warm your heart in this season of cold.

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