

MAN OF LA MANCHA • MAY 2007 • MINACK THEATRE

Review

Performed for the first few minutes at least, and rather surprisingly following such a wild and wet weekend, beneath both the sun and the moon, the setting was well nigh perfect on Bank Holiday Monday for the BROS Theatre Company's production of Man of La Mancha which revolves around the two extremes of reality and pretence. A Broadway musical of the 1960s, written by Dale Wasserman, based on his TV play I, Don Quixote and adapted from the novel by the Spanish author and dramatist Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, with lyrics by Joe Darion and music by Mitch Leigh, its plot is almost as surprising as the weather.

A play within the play, its pervading fear of the Inquisition, its pursuit of The Impossible Dream and man's spiritual need for illusion, its essential sadness and its attempts to answer the imponderable - why does one do the things that one does?

A million miles from The Sound of Music it needs careful handling to make it work and, fortunately, it gets just that from director Wesley Henderson Roe who, with the assistance of musical director Shaun Critten and choreographer Melanie Edwards, bravely shifts its balance from being solely about the Knight of the Woeful Countenance and his sidekick Sancho Panza to being about all of their fellow prisoners.

To achieve this he comes up with a group of people, each of whom, in turn, is a million miles away from the traditional member of the chorus.

While they ensure that there is a great deal happening on stage, so many stories being told, they are so good at it that they never detract from the main action but enhance it. While Bryan Cardus as the gentle, dreaming Knight Errant and eponymous, Man of La Mancha, Andy Clarke as his bugle-playing, devoted Sancho 'I Like Him' Panza, Sue Astbury as his spirited, 'What Does he Want of me?', dream girl Dulcinea, Carl Smith as the 'To Each His Dulcinea' and psalm singing Padre, Jonathan Simmons as the prison's singing barber, and Edz Barrett as the sparkling, not to say dazzling, Knight of the Mirrors, are all pleasing.

They are evenly matched by the medley of muleteers, ably led by Loz Keal, Moorish singers and dancers, publicans, prostitutes and prisoners, who accompany them on their Iberian-flavoured and mad adventures.

Ensemble playing at its very best, rarely has a supporting cast played such a cohesive, important and impressive role.

As the optimistic Don Quixote would have it - come one, come all, indeed!

Frank Ruhrmand
The Cornishman
