



First Night Reviews

American Idiot

North West Theatre Arts Company

Directed by Prab Singh, Musical Direction Beth Singh

The Grange Arts Centre: 26th - 30th July 2016.

I am always the first to leave a show at the end. Period.

It's the law. It's just the way it is.

I don't clap along either.

Tonight, I was the last to leave.

And OK, I admit it, I clapped along at the end.

I found that without thinking, I just had to sit in the auditorium at the end and try to make sense of the piece and the performances. And I came to two conclusions: why did I not already know the piece and equally, these superb performers?

For some, I guess this would have been Musical Marmite. But (thank the Lord) it was as far away from the recent swathe of *9 to 5's* and *Legally Blondes* that appear to have recently engulfed the planet that it could possibly have been. OK, everything in the theatre repertoire has its place and its audience, but *American Idiot* is pretty unique in my book (and I would hazard that in the wrong hands) it would die the death of a thousand theatrical deaths. But in the hands of North West Theatre Arts Company, a production team who knew exactly what they were doing, a cast who were 100% in the moment and technical support who pulled all the design and delivery stops out, it was simply glorious.

And make no mistake, this is not an easy ride for the audience.

This is a piece that needs to be concentrated on and not surprising, being based on Green Day's punk rock album-opera released in 2004.

It is big, brooding, brash and it packs in more expletives than an evening of *Springer Show* outtakes. But it takes a period of recent American history post-9/11 and tells the story of young American Society in a way that is painfully honest, dysfunctional, anarchic and plunged into a whole new depth of 'warts and all'. But the piece, the performers and the production did it in a profound and pacy manner which you could not easily take your eyes and thoughts away from. And although this harrowing libretto is devoid of subtlety, the abstractness of it all appeared to be its strength and once you acclimatised to the music and the rawness of the characters, it was impossible not to be utterly absorbed. Indeed, there was hardly any applause – and rightly so. I guess it demanded more than just the polite conforming acknowledgement of a fee paying public and we all collectively appreciated just that.

The direction from Prab Singh was slick, fluid, in your face, at times overwhelming and then in a flash, withdrawn into the shadows. And the vocals matched the drama. Hard, dictatorial, unrelenting and balanced with caressing harmonies which blended beautifully – and with a set of backing tracks which were pretty damn good. An outstanding finished product and all the work of MD Beth Singh. And I must say that my highlights were in the opening of act 2 followed by *Letterbomb* and *Wake Me Up When September Ends*. Superb.

The choreography was mesmerising, original and totally interpretive of the score and the lyrics. The company formed and reformed in a way that redefined teamwork and the creatives responsible deserved their own bow (Katie Gough and Holly Younge).

And I believe the whole thing was achieved in five weeks. Think about it. Five weeks. Unbelievable. But that's what hard work, dedication and commitment can do.