

DNA Review by Sharon Drummond North West Theatre Arts Company (NWTAC)

The open set for this show looked amazing with grass, leaves, tree stumps denoting a forest, an open field and every scene in the show.

The lighting plot worked beautifully and each of the young actors projected well with clear diction and the sound edits worked well. The play is set in a non specified time but costumes were current day and mainly school uniforms but all looked authentic.

I had never seen this show before by Dennis Kelly but it dealt with some hard hitting subjects such as bullying, peer pressure and power struggles and keeping secrets. The direction of the piece was superbly put together and the scene endings with incidental music were very clever and kept the tense atmosphere throughout.

The script makes every character flawed and unlikeable and this group of young actors portrayed that beautifully. These were characterisations that they could really get their teeth into and they did this with great commitment.

Holly Norbury and Jonny Molyneux played Jan and Mark respectively and filled the roles superbly. The often narrated the scenes and kept the suspense up.

Abi Cooper who played Leah on the night that I watched was absolutely brilliant in her portrayal of the talkative (non stop) role. She would talk herself in and out of any given subject but Abi's diction was clear so not a word was missed. Her characterisation was spot on showing the awkwardness with her friend Phil but her role within the group of friends was much more assured. A great well rounded performance Abi.

In complete contrast James Valentine's character Phil barely spoke. But when he did it was as the leader of the group (despite others believing they were). His scenes with Abi as Leah were brilliant. He ate his way through every scene and managed to remain indifferent to every comment she made. This was an inspired characterisation as doing less onstage is extremely difficult and James not only kept our attention but drew everyone in.

Lou was well played by Tess Bottomley who delivered her lines with clear diction and reacted well with Liam Watson who played John Tate. Liam played John with a threatening style that was delivered with a deep uncertainty as he tried to establish his place in the group of troubled teenagers. With no redeeming qualities, John was a challenging role which Liam portrayed superbly well and found the proper characteristics for this part.

Three of the female actors played male roles and Ashleigh Rogers as Danny, Katie Damer as Richard and Katie Gough as Brian were all fabulous. Katie Damer portrayed her role with ease and her delivery of lines was very natural. In contrast Katie Gough's character Brian was losing the plot and nervously crying, laughing or snivelling all the time. This was a very uncomfortable watch as the rest of the cast bullied Brian into some horrible acts but brilliantly portrayed by Katie Gough.

Kate Bannister was very convincing as Cathy the wannabee celebrity who is not the brightest tool in the box. Her naivety was her downfall as she became hardened to the horrible acts not just going on around her but partook in most of them. What starts as a one dimensional character turns into one of the most interesting and compelling characters which Kate portrayed brilliantly.

Elton Amoateng was great as Boy. This is the first serious role I have seen Elton play and I was very impressed with his portrayal and characterisation.

Overall this company should be very proud of this production which was extremely thought provoking and well acted. The Production team including staging, lighting and direction never shy of challenging pieces of work. It is wrong to say I enjoyed it as the subject matter was deeply disturbing but this was a very compelling and well portrayed drama.