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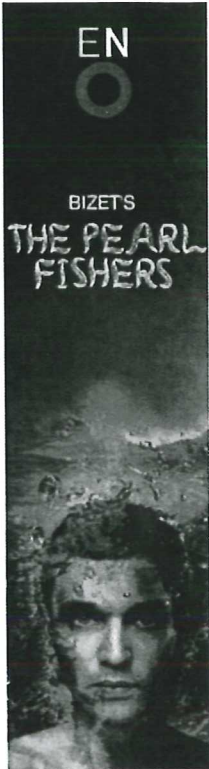
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classical opera company

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Kiss of the Spider Woman (Hull)

Venue: Hull Truck Theatre

Where: Hull

Date Reviewed: 11 June 2010

WOS Rating: ★★★★★

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Kiss of the Spider Woman's oppressive, intimate set

Phillip Witcomb's set design, with its condensation damp walls and sparse rigidity, is oppressive and intimate. The atmosphere of the Argentinean prison cell in which the action takes place emanates thickly into the auditorium. I am impressed by the striking immediacy of the dire circumstances for this play's central characters.

Valentin, a young Marxist idealist, is incarcerated due to his political views. He is forced to share a cell with Molina, a romantic fantasist, condemned for his sexuality. At first, the two very different men learn to tolerate each other. As time passes they become mutually dependent until eventually their two worlds converge, and they find themselves deeply connected. However, all is not what it seems. Molina is at the mercy of the prison authorities having agreed that he will inform on Valentin in exchange for a pardon.

To pass the time Molina enacts one of his favourite movies. The story within a story is a device which serves multiple purposes. The re-told film is a metaphor that parallels the play's action; it is a way of accessing the characters' internal worlds, particularly Valentin's sensitivity and refined aesthetic; and it is a welcome relief from the stark cell existence.

Having said this, the play is not overly bleak. At times the cell becomes a relative domestic paradise and the happiness that the two men find in each other resonates through the despair of their situation. Direction from Hannah Chissick ensures that the tableau is varied and makes much out of very little to prevent stasis.

Tony Timberlake's interpretation of Molina is tender and human and incredibly likeable. His performance of the character's duality is simultaneously concealed and evident which is no mean feat. Timberlake's range is further demonstrated throughout the re-enactment of the film within the play; at times sensual, humorous and full of pathos; and in the scenes which demand more raw emotion.

Daniel Crossley's performance as Valentin has fewer dimensions but packs the necessary punch. I am pleasantly surprised when the character temporarily loses control, having been pushed to the limit, before returning to a familiar driven intensity.

This studio production is simple but highly effective. The intimate setting, truthful performances and clear direction facilitate a satisfying sympathy and a moving experience of a beautiful, lyrical play.

- Joanne Hartley

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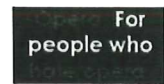
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