

THIEF OF TIME Stage Whispers review.



By Sir Terry Pratchett. Unseen Theatre Company. Adapted and directed by Pamela Munt. Co-directed by David Dyte. Bakehouse Theatre, Adelaide. 23 May-7 June, 2014.

Attempting to create a complex, fantastical, alternative world, where what we would regard as magical and/or supernatural is not only common-place but necessary, on a fairly small stage, with relatively modest technical resources, would seem to be quite the challenge. No less of a battle is that of condensing/distilling a complex novel into a digestible stage presentation of reasonable length. In addition, one must aim to provide viewers who have little or no prior knowledge of the source material in question with as satisfying an experience as that of the more die-hard fans.

Unseen Theatre Company - led by director/producer/scripter/actor Pamela Munt - are specialists at adapting the work of Terry Pratchett, and their latest is something a mixed success, but generally an enjoyable one. Having the bare minimum of experience with the author's work (two books during the far-away high-school days, both of them recalled fondly), this reviewer was borderline-bewildered by much of the show - but, happily, entertained by most of it.

Thief of Time's storyline is fit to bursting with unusual ideas and concepts, many of them derived from messing about with the fundamental laws of nature and physics and mathematics. At its playful best, the tone of the show manages to be amusingly droll and arrestingly offbeat.



Helping a good deal is the level of energy and enthusiasm brought to the proceedings by the talented actors. Making an exceptionally strong impression - despite (or perhaps because of) working from behind a (quite literal) Death's head mask - is Hugh O'Connor as the Reaper himself, with a performance both fearsome and funny. Also standing out in this cast are Philip Lineton, crafting an engaging characterisation as elderly mentor Lu-Tze (and dealing deftly with a large amount of offbeat exposition), as well as Leighton James in a demanding dual role.

Costumes by Michelle Whichello strike just the right visual note to match the tone of the show. The lighting and special effects technicians (Stephen Dean and Matthew Conor Duggan) get their moments to shine, though on occasion, the actors have seemingly been directed to perform in a dim corner of a nicely-lit stage, for no very useful reason.

The level of noise during scene transitions was still something of a problem on opening night, particularly since it threatened on occasion to drown out the between-scene commentary by Melanie Lyons' pre-recorded/projected narrator. If there's any script where you don't want to miss important details for fear of

being left behind, it's this one.

Where *Thief of Time* stumbles somewhat is in its ambitious telling of a peculiar and complex story, which will doubtless be simply too peculiar and complex for some viewers to get their head around. Particularly in the second half, this tends to limit true audience involvement with the action. One senses the attempt at building towards a climax of tension and excitement, with a number of wacky laughs and colourful diversions along the way, but the script cannot quite achieve 100% of what it aims for.

Those aims, however, are enough to keep things intriguing and entertaining for the most part, and are enough to make *Thief of Time* recommendable, especially for those who seek something unusual.

Anthony Vawser