

Theatre Review of *The Crucible*

The opening night of Camberwell Grammar School's production of *The Crucible* on May 7, 2009, was a notable and successful performance. The actors played their characters' roles accurately and the plot was easy to follow despite large sections of the script having been excised to tailor the play for the demands of a school performance. Key scenes were enacted particularly well and the climaxes in the play were reflected in the performance. The costumes were well made and suited the characters well, although there were some weaknesses in the production values of the play, particularly with regard to sound, which occasionally made dialogue difficult to understand, and the limitations imposed on the set design.

The majority of actors played their roles with impressive conviction. John Proctor, played by Zac Puplett, and Stephen McDonald's role in the character of Giles Corey, successfully gave the image of being commoners and farmers through their demeanour and presentation. The Reverend Parris was well portrayed as a man of authority whose grip on power is, at best, a tenuous one. Judge Danforth, when he appeared, had a powerful presence on stage. He exuded authority, with his deliberate, well articulated pattern of speech and his almost scornful tone. Another notable performance was that of Melahni Dean's character, the Reverend Parris's slave, Tituba. She had an authentic Barbados accent for her role and delivered a fine portrayal of a character who becomes entrapped in circumstances beyond her understanding and control.

Significant scenes such as Proctor's recitation of the Ten Commandments and his wife Elizabeth's questioning about Proctor's lechery were acted well, with notable tension on stage when Elizabeth was asked by Danforth whether Proctor had committed adultery with Abigail after Proctor's admission of the charge. The climax of the play, where Proctor chooses the dignity and integrity of his name over his life, saw Puplett enact the scene with a real sense of the conflict that faces his character; he was convincing in the energy he brought to this moment of the play, which sounded like 'a cry of his soul', as the play suggests it should be. The audience was challenged to respond to what was presented on stage as the actors presented the confusion and madness that the Salem witch trials brought with them. The audience could sense the injustice and misunderstandings between the characters and felt compelled and engaged by the power and deception of some such as the Reverend Parris's niece, Abigail Williams, who was played by Phoebe Darlison. The production successfully depicted the main themes of the play in relation to the conflicts it depicts such as the intrapersonal conflict Proctor undergoes over his reputation and good name and his guilt for his past actions, as well as the interpersonal conflict created by the imbalance of power deriving from social attitudes and, importantly, the power of gossip and rumour within the village. When the village girls joined against the Proctors' serving girl, Mary Warren, in the courthouse, their low intonation forced the audience to wonder where the truth really lay.

The set, with its wooden beams and walls, looked rugged and simple, much like the lives of the characters it contained. The clever reconfiguration of the set to do duty as the upstairs bedroom of the Reverend Parris's home, or the downstairs rooms of John and Elizabeth Proctor, or the village's prison, showed a versatile approach to the staging of the play that was appreciated by the audience.

Notable mentions go to Deputy Governor Danforth, played by Christopher Kapiniaris and Phoebe Darlison's portrayal of Abigail Williams. Congratulations must also go to the rest of the cast and the

production team and staff who helped to form the production that successfully depicted the nightmare that was Salem in 1692.

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