

pt at large

reviews, commentaries, stories

December 01, 2008

Mary's Wedding:

Mary's Wedding

Play by Stephen Massicotte

Directed by: Meg Taintor. Lights, Erik Fox. Set, Emily Nichols.

Presented by Whistler in the Dark Theatre. At: Boston Center for the Arts

Rehearsal Hall A, through Nov. 29 www.bostontheatrescene.com Photo courtesy of Meg Taintor

"Mary's Wedding" is a delight of a play. Mary's well-to-do family from London has emigrated to the provinces in Canada in 1914. Impending war broods in Europe and young love is kindled in the countryside when Mary meets farm boy Charlie. The violent crashes of the thunderstorm outside the barn in which they meet in search of shelter foretell the explosions that will soon rock the European countryside.

The power of the play, aside from its ardent two actors, is the inventively non-linear way it unfolds. Playwright Stephen Massicotte arranges his play as carefully as one would a tea service on a tray, intentionally drops it to the floor, picks it up and rearranges it with no regard for chronology. The strategy works. Sometimes we're not quite sure whether we're watching real time or dream time. We are sure, however, that we're watching love bloom in all its lurches and turns, exhilarations and doubts.

In a prelude, Charlie says, "It begins at the end and ends at the beginning, and there are some sad parts..." The play alternates between real time and Mary's dreams recounting her meeting and courtship with Charlie. After a bit of a shaky start with Mary's frenetic movements in the first storm sequence, the play hits its stride, both actors filling their roles with the awkward grace of youth and inexperience. The social divide between Mary and muddy Charlie washes away in successive meetings. Charlie's behavior at the tea party to which Mary invites him is like watching a seal in its first encounter with a swimming pool - from uneasiness with the environment to comfort that it can survive in it.

Mary's dream, on the eve of her wedding in July 1920, transports us from one side of the ocean to the other. War scenes with Mary reading Charlie's letters are intertwined with Charlie's acting out the scenes of men going 'over the top' and being mowed down like so many sheaves of wheat. Equally gut-wrenching is the naivety of boys going to war with no idea of the chaos into which they will be led.

Photo by Meg Taintor



Charlie's recounting of the first time he draws a bead on a German and kills him produces the same nausea in the audience as it does within Charlie. The later scene in which Charlie murderously rides through German lines and enjoys his kills is all you have to know about the demons war can unleash in the kindest and gentlest of men. And perhaps this is why, for so many years, veterans of the first two world wars never spoke of what they witnessed or did on those distant shores.

Mary and Charlie are on stage together for the production's full ninety minutes. The shifts from bucolic Canada to muddy

shell-shocked France are seamless. Massicotte's writing deftly illustrates the permeability of the boundaries between of tenderness and barbarity in wartime - one minute a scene of reading a love letter while sitting in the mud, the next minute an order to fix bayonets.

Charlie's increased conditioning toward mayhem and death growing in the same heart that dreams of marrying and fathering a family with Mary, and Mary's devotion to the boy she senses turning into a man, are beautifully wrought and remain with you far into the night.

The whole is satisfyingly equal to the parts of this production. Samson Kohanski and Jennifer O'Connor play beautifully off one another. The hand of director Meg Tainor, lighting by Erik Fox, and spare set by Emily Nichols all contribute to writer Massicotte's vision.

The senseless slaughter of war and the grief of love lost were real in 1920. They are no less real today. Somehow that news is easier to take in "Mary's Dream" than in the headlines of today's newspapers.

December 01, 2008 in [Theater reviews](#) | [Permalink](#)

Comments

Hi Paul,

I always enjoy receiving your reviews. Thank you for keeping me on your email list! We went and saw "Rock and Roll" at the Huntington Theatre a couple of weeks ago. Did you see it? It was not at all what we were expecting, and I was caught off guard. But we stayed for it and thought it was great. I have liked Tom Stoppard since "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern", so was glad when "Rock and Roll" improved through the evening!

Posted by: Cathleen | [December 10, 2008 at 11:03 PM](#)