

more relaxed than when heard the previous weekend and allowing his baritone to bloom much more in Wolf than in Monteverdi. Jamie MacDougall's clean and fresh tenor gave notice of much promise although the soprano, Olivia Blackburn, was more problematic; her distorted vowel sounds suggested several technical difficulties.

Still, her performance of Maude Valerie White's "So we'll go no more a-roving" made a touching valediction before we ventured out into the night air.

Almeida

Nicholas de Jongh

Hello and Goodbye

FOR all its delving into boxes which team yesterday's memories and its sudden spurts of physical action, Athol Fugard's *Hello and Goodbye* is really a still life play. It presents the life picture of Johnnie, a young near-derelect in his Port Elizabeth hovel, whose mind is stranded in the past.

As an invitation to luxuriate in pathos it cannot be faulted, even though Fugard fails to show or explain reasons for which Johnnie has reached such an unpretty pass.

Admittedly Fugard in this play, the first in an RSC season at the Almeida, does organise a kind of close encounter at 57a Valley Road when Hester arrives home after a 15-year absence to find Johnnie, her unwelcoming brother, living so deeply in the past that he can scarcely be persuaded anywhere close to the here and now. The reason for her late return is financially motivated: somewhere deep in the room where their one-legged daddy supposedly sleeps the sleep of the chronically invalid is the compensation he received when one of his legs was for-

feited in an explosion.

Her return therefore inspires the revelatory and fragrant pathos in which a series of cardboard boxes are ransacked for money and reveal nothing but nostalgic family relics and litter: a pair of crutches, their mother's sweet smelling dress and ancient newspapers from the 1930s. Hester's materialism is thus contrasted with her brother's lack of interest in anything material.

This scene proves the emotional high peak of a play which otherwise shrinks from exposures or explanations while it revels compassionately in the hermetic manners of Johnnie, a furtive self-absorbed fantasist whose life is confined to his imagination. Hester scarcely seems aware of her brother's state or responds to it. Extended nostalgia afforded by the old boxes and the long-anticipated revelation that daddy is in fact long dead strike few sparks and fail to provide the play with the momentum it requires. The focus is simply upon an example of pathetic withdrawal and all-embracing impoverishment (Johnnie) and a co-relative, a girl who has escaped from here to find nothing much (Hester).

Janice Honeyman's production is meticulous in its detailed evocation of shabby tenement existence enacted on a stage set designed by Louise Belson with a melancholic array of bric-a-brac. And Antony Sher gives another of his arresting and flamboyant demonstrations of how far he can conceal and alter his own personality. With hair close cropped around the temples, a guttural rasping voice, he darts furtively about the stage like some small bird, talking to himself, keeping his eyes down when his sister arrives and lapsing into a kind of chattering fearfulness. It is a performance which may be a little too showy and spectacular but is riveting to observe. And Estelle Kohler handsomely struts and storms into his life with a parallel kind of greedy self-absorption.

Nicholas de Jongh on Hello & Goodbye

Clipped By:



ianharris

Sat, Feb 22, 2020