

Dogfight Review by Sharon Drummond North West Theatre Arts Company (NWTAC)

Although I knew much of the music from this show this was my first time seeing the whole production. I am so glad this group gave me my first journey to this show as they performed it brilliantly. I know certain directors will relish this feisty, uncomfortable subject matter, gritty musical and Prab Singh is certainly one of those directors.

Set in the 1960's during the Vietnam War with scenes in both the USA and the conflict in Vietnam it explores the relationships between fellow Marines and the women they meet just before leaving for the conflict.

The sets looked amazing with winged/sliding flats depicting different scenes, a bedroom set back, gauze covered to soften the scenes here, a café, trenches and clever use of props for other scenes. Due to the inventive set building and use of props there were no hold ups between scenes. Costumes were fabulous and the changes of them were fast when needed. They suited each character and added to the story depiction.

The lighting plot was imaginative and added to the atmosphere for many of the scenes and the sound worked very well.

There was not a weak link in the casting and this group fills me with sheer joy as I watch each one of them grow and learn from their mentors who are so passionate about their craft. Prab, Bethany and Katie you inspire me at every visit and Mark who not only stage manages but builds the sets is a genius.

Everyone of the cast were terrific with the boys playing the Marines having believable morals and the girls who accompany them showing different characters from the streetwise to the immature but always in character. Vocally the chorus were stunning with gorgeous vocals and perfect harmonies. Jonny Molyneux also sounded fab as the lounge singer and put in some nice cameo roles too.

Annabelle Cook and Eva Carty sounded fantastic in their solo lines and Tess Bottomley as Mama and one of the girls acted both parts, which were very different with great characterisation. Melissa Grimes portrayal as Marcy was both funny but also very poignant with her understanding of what is going on. Melissa looked incredible but also acted and sang with great skill.

Reece Challinor as Boland and James Burke as Bernstein both grow with confidence in each show. This one was no different. Their banter and relationship was never overplayed but as young Marines they were uncouth and selfish. From scene to scene they played differing emotions which struck chords with the audience. Fabulous performances from both.

The two lead actors were absolutely stunning. Kate Bannister as Rose was so believable and her acting skills in delivering this sensitive part were spot on. Kate has beautiful vocals which so suited these songs and her interaction with Liam Watson was so enthralling to watch. This is the most well rounded part I have ever seen Kate play and I loved how the female audience supported her throughout the show. I thoroughly enjoyed this portrayal Kate.

Equally Liam Watson was absolutely phenomenal as Eddie Birdplace and had his hair shorn to complete the Marine look. His character was deeply flawed, manipulative and selfish and there were many scenes when I wanted to punch him for being so mean. His soft side,

falling for Rose albeit initially manipulative was in stark contrast in a performance where light and shade looked apparent but each scene had so much more to it than the surface feelings and characterisation. Liam's vocals were fabulous and his falsetto sounded beautiful. This was a brilliant portrayal and his interactions with all the other actors were authentic and touching. I cried at the awful predicament he was often in and especially the final scenes of survivor's guilt. A truly courageous performance Liam.

The whole experience from start to finish was wonderful and I was totally in the moment as it was so well played and staged by the whole company. The production company and cast put this together in 8 weeks which for a newer musical is a very short amount of time. Such is the professionalism of this company that it could not have been a better show. I loved it. Thank you guys and girls for a fantastic night.

Sharon Drummond