

Review of The Elephant Man by Evening Echo Journalist Tom King

Weekend

A monstrous challenge, but company pulls it off

REVIEW

The Elephant Man
Cornelius Vermuyden
School, Canvey

right notes of balance and conviction.

The play mixes horror and deep compassion as it tells the story of this extraordinary man, a sweet-natured, intelligent and sensitive individual wrapped in a monster's body. It is the ultimate true-life Beast story, and Merrick's search for a corresponding Beauty provides much of the momentum of the play.

Faced with this literally monstrous challenge, Cast & Crew pulled things off impressively.

Chief credit must go to Martin Lepley in the title role. His only physical props were a half-shaven scalp (suggestive of Merrick's vast, disproportioned head) and a twisted stoop. The rest was left to acting ability.

Lepley's passionate performance drew us deep into the mind and feelings of the Elephant Man.

He was matched scene for scene by Matthew Warner, playing the surgeon Sir Frederick Treves, the man who rescued Merrick from his life as a fairground freak, and installed him as an increasingly famous Institution at the London Hospital. The wealthy and confident medical man undergoes his own arc of self-doubt and disillusion, partly brought about from his friendship with Merrick. Surgeon and circus freak are both vulnerable people. The counterplay between their two lives makes for a moving double act.

Director Rob Simmons' production proved extraordinarily effective at drawing us into Merrick's strange world, and leaving us at the end both uplifted and emotionally hammered by this extraordinary true story of human triumph against the odds.

TOM KING

"The drama company Cast & Crew could well re-christen themselves Cast, Crew and Guts after taking the decision to stage The Elephant Man, the true story of Joseph Merrick, a man so hideously deformed that hardened nurses fainted when they saw him in the flesh. Bernard Pomerance's dramatisation of his life is a huge challenge to any acting company which no doubt explains why this is the first amateur production to be staged in South Essex in a couple of decades. It is not just a matter of how to present Merrick himself and his monstrous body, but also of hitting the right notes of balance and conviction. The play mixes horror and deep compassion as it tells the story of this extraordinary man, a sweet natured, intelligent and sensitive individual wrapped in a monster's body. It is the ultimate true-life Beast story and Merrick's search for a corresponding beauty provides much of the momentum of the play. Faced with this literally monstrous challenge, Cast and Crew pulled things off impressively. Chief credit must go to Martin Lepley in the title role. His only physical props were a half shaven scalp (suggestive of Merrick's vast, disproportioned head) and a twisted stoop. The rest was left to acting ability. Lepley's passionate performance drew us deep into the mind and feelings of the elephant man. He was matched scene for scene by Matthew Warner, playing the surgeon Sir Frederick Treves, the man who rescued Merrick from his life as a fairground freak and installed him as an increasingly famous Institution at the London hospital. The wealthy and confident medical man undergoes his own arc of self doubt and disillusion, partly brought about from his friendship with Merrick. Surgeon and circus freak are both vulnerable people. The counterplay between the two lives makes for a moving double act. Director from Simmons' production proved extraordinarily effective at drawing us into Merrick's strange world and leaving us at the end both uplifted and emotionally hammered by this extraordinary true story of human triumph against the odds. TOM KING"

Martin Lepley was awarded Tom King's 'Tommy Award 2015 for Best Male Performance in a play'