

'The Elephant Man' roars at RTC

What if your features were hideous? What if your heart and soul were beautiful? The very true story of the Elephant Man is told with taste and talent by the Rockaway Theatre Company. Although unfolding in the 1880s, this stylized cos-

ture drama has poignant relevance today.

Director Frank Caiati has a well-earned list of credentials both onstage and behind the scenes. In this production he delivers another compassionate, powerful performance as Doctor Frederick Treves. His

direction is also mesmerizing. He humbly creates an eerie silence that overcomes the audience. The message? Clearly, the "normal" onstage humans in their greed and prejudice prove far more grotesque than the deformed Elephant Man.

As John Merrick, afflicted with a rare disfiguring condition, Byron Hagan (debuting at RTC) does not use theatrical make up to display the deformities. Instead, he amazingly contorts his face, torso, hands and legs. The result must be truly painful and leaves the audience breathless. Verbally, his speech becomes deliberately slurred. They are in stark contrast to his sensitive observations on life's cruelties. Bravo!

Producer Susan Jasper's cast plays multiple roles. Sometimes benevolent, other times cruel. Always pointed and meaningful. Kudos to Thomas J. Kane, Fred Grieco, Robert Mintzes, Brian Sadowski, Frank Freeman, Adele Wendt, Dana Mongelli and Susan Warren Corning.

A particularly well studied and sensitive performance is offered by O'me Komen. Portraying worldly Mrs. Kendal she reveals physical and emotional vulnerabilities with dire consequences.

The sets (designed by Caiati) are somber and striking. Though harshly reflective of 1880s Victorian England, there is a certain beauty in the brushed strokes and colors. Costumes (Tristan Kerry O'Connor are impeccable. Sound (Richard Louis Pierre, Daniel Fay, Alex Stabiner), lighting (Andrew Woodbridge, Jessica Mintzes and tech (Tony Homsey) are also above expectations. The overall presentation is once again far above regional level with additional bows for Suzanne Riggs (stag manager), Peggy Page (house manager and the numerous backstage participants.

For information on this and future productions call 718-374-6400, "like" them on Facebook or surf to www.rockawaytheatrecompany.org. As always, save me a seat on the aisle.



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