

Review of 'Godspell' by Hilary Mackelden

Once again Rotherfield Players set the Gold Standard with their production of Godspell, a fast paced amateur production that pushed some professional shows into the shadow.

Based on the Gospel of Matthew, the play seems at first to be a production of two halves; the joyous energy of the first act giving counterbalance to the heavy emotion of the second. Yet even in the first act's exuberance, the coming darkness looms large. The sadness and tension builds behind the laughter, pulling the unsuspecting audience with it. We only realise how engrossed we have become when Jesus slaps Judas, and the entire audience gasps its shock. Paramount to any depiction of the Gospel is the casting of Jesus and Judas. The actors must be talented and charismatic, willing to give their all. In Barry Shyvers and Steve Bishop, Rotherfield were truly blessed. They had an on-stage chemistry that is impossible to manufacture. The enmity they built was frightening, a character in itself.

Special mention must be made of the scene when the main characters return their waistcoats to Jesus shortly before his crucifixion. A mundane act, but under Sarah Truelove's skilled direction it became theatre at its powerful, emotion-wringing best.

The musicians, too, were excellent and it was a surprise to hear that for some of them, it was a first-time experience. They played like seasoned professionals. In a superb production, things that stood out included the wonderful dance routines, the polished chorus, Kate Awcock's fabulous voice, Louise Payne's movement, Mark Longhurst's comic timing and the heartbreaking song from the cross.

I wanted to go back and watch it all over again