

THEATRE REVIEW - Clocks 1888: the greener

PUBLISHED DATE: 18 APRIL 2016 | PUBLISHED BY: ANTONY CLAY

THEATRE REVIEW: CLOCKS 1888: the greener at Cast Theatre, Doncaster

OPERA can be an acquired taste for most people but those who doubt its ability to entertain and tell a good tale should have popped along to watch Clocks 1888: the greener.

A lively new opera with a hard-hitting story to tell, and made all the more entertaining by an imaginative stage set and sterling performances from the cast of four.

The new production, created by Rachana Jadhav and Dominic Hingorani with music by Martin Wood, considers the very current topic of immigration and the role immigrants play in society. It also considers the role of women in British history.

Greener is an uneducated but brilliant teenage girl who looks after the clock that runs all the work in the East End.

But, as an immigrant woman, she is controlled by the jaw droppingly seedy (and rather blunt) Coster. Ma is also under the thumb of Coster and looks after Greener who has an admirer in the form of wealthy do-gooder Author.

The opera centres on the shifting relationships between the four characters leading to a dramatic conclusion.

The songs are lively and hit the mark when telling this tale of subjugation and the fight for freedom.

Coster's character dominates proceedings because in his world everything swirls around him. He doesn't want to go back to the poverty he came from so he makes sure everyone suffers to give him what he wants.

Dickson Gough gave a sterling performance at Coster, at times manipulative, at times slimy, at times cruel and very often funny in a dark way.

Keisha Atwell as Greener was the perfect ballsy teenager who wants to rebel but finds herself hemmed in by her employer and her guardian. When there is an apparent light at the end of the tunnel in the form of Author (played by Adam Temple-Smith), she is realistic enough to see he's ultimately too much of a coward to put his own life on the line for her in the end.

But Ma, performed by Patricia Rozario, is the real operatic tragedy figure. She spends her days stitching handkerchiefs as an old woman but in her youth fought for Indian Independence. Coster (the Englishman) still gets to lord it over her after discovering her penniless because she was abandoned by a Colonial British family.

There is a lot to say, and the opera says it well. For non-opera aficionados it was easy to follow and enjoy and a great introduction to the art form, and to seasoned opera fans (as there were in the audience) it works very well.

Opera has an image problem in Britain but as an art form it does often take on important social topics, particularly in modern works such as this.

This is another success for Cast as well, a theatre with a growing reputation for new and innovative work.

ANTONY CLAY