

Words, Glorious and Golden Creating Poetry

A review of AND FLIGHTS OF ANGELS SING THEE

by vinnyparrillo on 12/16/2010 - Triggerstreet

AND FLIGHTS OF ANGELS is a marvelous piece of theater. The authors' knowledge of setting, character development and word play are talents I found myself very envious of. This wonderful depiction of three of our greatest stage actors' inner thoughts, competitiveness, fears and loves is skillfully intertwined with humor and theater magic. Every characters' motion is mixed with dialogue that includes the audience -- forcing them to empathize with each characters' human foibles and hidden history. The audience cannot help recognizing John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson through each characters' exacting dialogue and even though the authors disclaim an exact documentation of the actors' lives, the audience "hears" their voices explicitly, especially John Gielgud's.

During the reading, I often used the online dictionary to make sure I understood the exact meanings of many of the jokes the authors made. I particularly loved the "Keep yer ass behind the arras." line.

This play is written in the manner of Shakespeare's great writing, wonderfully juxtaposed with 20th century humor, stage settings and human frailty -- while skillfully playing with word sounds and meanings that, I believe, will give an audience a fulfilling evening of pleasure, just as the old Bard must have done in the Elizabethan age. I learned a lot about playwriting structure and editing after reading AND FLIGHTS OF ANGELS and edited my own work to reflect Deacon and Constant's template.

If this play has not yet been produced it is a lost treasure that today's audiences are missing and should be included in a theater's project as soon as possible

by wridget on 05/26/2011

This is a fantastic concept for a play, and in execution, is not unlike its central subject - intensely ambitious, in love with the written word, and possessed of great brilliance and nagging faults in nearly equal measure.

This script contains many things I haven't found on Triggerstreet very often - a truly inspired premise, huge swaths of eloquence, some lovely dream imagery, and several profound meditations on both theatre and life. But it sometimes seems that you became so immersed in Gielgud's point of view that what was supremely important to him became important to you - namely, those magical, terrible things called words. Thus, we as an audience spend a majority of the play hearing John talk about his life rather than watching him live it. Now, this is certainly a valid approach to telling the man's story, but it imbues your play with many of the same weaknesses that dogged your protagonist - it becomes a dazzling display of technique without much humanity behind it.

The play starts off with a lovely dose of surreality - the aging John unable to remember one of the most famous lines in Shakespeare, the pleasantly ridiculous entrance of Ralph, and the lovely image of the two men literally wiping the years away from their faces in the dressing room mirrors. But then we are treated to six pages of John talking about his past to someone who already knows most of it, and the lovely atmosphere you've established suddenly gives way to a "Greatest Quotations" booklet. "Here's what I said to this person that one time. Here's what this person once said about me". You do an awful lot of telling throughout the play when you could just as easily show it, especially with the dreamlike flow you've so expertly crafted. What I think frustrated me the most with the "past tense" exposition-stuffed sections of dialogue was that when you actually do show scenes more or less in progress, they're almost uniformly wonderful, and have actually grown richer as I've re-read them while writing this review. The first meetings of John and Ralph, then John and Larry are great stuff, full of nuance and subtext.

In fact, you do such a skillful job of compact scenes in dream-logic collage through most of this that scenes like the four and a half page monologue about John's film career just feel lazy. The musings about voices and ghosts are quite poetic and carry weight, but most of the rest of it feels more like trivia than a dramatic confession. I would much rather see a scene in the surreal language you're so fluent in - perhaps that recording session in the 70's for the Ghost yet again. He can still have the monologue about ghosts and narrators, but in the context of some sort of action, then maybe realizes that the person "in the booth" is no longer there, that he is left alone with his own voice, echoing the lines from Hamlet over and over. Then Ralph could appear, actually saying the line about narration John ascribes to him, and you could go on from there to the same revelation? Something besides four pages of showbiz anecdotes that start your second act with a droning whimper. The dramatic drive of the rest of the act just

makes this section feel more and more stilted and awkward. That may even be what you're going for, but I would advise against it.

And speaking of that revelation, I'm not sure leaving it for act two is such a good idea. I mean, it's quite obvious from the minute he sits in that dressing room and wipes the years off his face that this is taking place beyond the grave. I understand the urge to make that realization part of the character's journey, but it's really not necessary, and sometimes even works against the real story, which is the tension between he and Larry and how it slowly reveals to John just how closed off from humanity he really is. Personally, I'd lead with Ralph telling him he's dead, and go from there. Granted, it might cut against the nice aura of confusion that colors the first act, but it could make certain practical stage business much easier - for instance, the actors could go back and forth in age just through their physicality without having to worry about changing in and out of cumbersome wigs. But all in all, this is probably more a personal preference than a true weakness in the script.

But apart from these issues, much of this script is nothing short of a delight. The characters are very well drawn (although I could have used a tad more of Ralph, especially involving Kit. That second act grave scene might pack more punch if we're aware of her existence before she's gone), much of the dialogue is just downright ravishing, especially John's final monologue about his addiction to words, and your ending is pitch perfect. I was very moved, even though certain other parts of the script left me feeling a little emotionally disconnected. I was a little iffy about the planting of the gun, and some of its uses throughout the show, but the final image of John shooting out the worklight - finally free from the glare that has presided over his whole life - was so perfect that it more than won me over.

I could certainly see actors and directors just feasting on this material, and I must admit, this is one of two scripts I've read on here that have had me itching to direct them myself. Overall, an inspired, gripping play that may be a little too much of a muchness in its present state. But a little judicious pruning could easily take this from good to truly great.close