

P&P on a summer evening

Pride and Prejudice in Trinity College Gardens, 9th July 2013
Oxford Theatre Guild – adapted by Peter Kenvyn-Jones -
<http://www.oxfordtheatreguild.com/>

I had to remind myself that this was not a professional company, as they commanded the stage and carried the summer audience with them, celebrating the 200th anniversary of *Pride and Prejudice*. The Oxford Theatre Guild is an amateur enterprise, albeit one that has been running open-air performances for half a century.

Although Lizzie Bennett and Darcy are obviously central roles in the novel, the complicated social whirls and ‘schemes of infamy’ around them require an ensemble cast in the truest sense, and this is what we were treated to here - it really wouldn't be right to single out any of the actors, all of whom contributed skill of high order in delivering humour, pathos or pomp, as the role required.

The abridgement and adaptation of the novel into a theatre piece was also very skilful; the complex story was well shaped into two and a half hours of very well-paced action, plus a generous interval.

The scenery was simply devised; not naturalistic, but convincingly representing many different locations; great houses, lesser houses and gardens. Stage management was excellent, with some clever and subtle lighting effects: there were memorable vignettes, such as an overcast Mr Bennett entering the stage quietly beneath the vengeful church sermon of the Rev Collins; letters read by the sender from the stage corners; and some skilful dancing choreographed for a very small space!

The venue, on the exceptional lawn of Trinity College, was fantastic. It was impressive to note actors combating the occasional motorbike roar and other inconveniences of the town centre, but most of the time we felt immersed in the sylvan location (and were blessed with ideal summer weather).

Impressive too that we were so well looked after, with a refreshment tent, and blankets available for the evening as the sun eventually hid its face, while the programme was well designed and printed and imparted helpful information: peripheral issues maybe, but they all help to make an evening into an event.

Very impressive all round, and much enjoyed by a very full audience who had been queueing up the road in advance – so if you are around Oxford this summer, don't miss out!

N Daisley 9th July 2013