

Just Short of Dreadful

Wrivu Martin

On the 3rd of May many had gathered at the Ashfield Polish club to witness what had at first, seemed to be a promising play, Passageways of Suburbia - created by young talent and produced by Bangladesh Society for Puja and Culture. But the night itself was just short of dreadful.

The stage play was scheduled to begin at 7 or 8 o'clock. Knowing Bengali's, nothing would start till 8 and as it turned out that's what happened. The food and drinks arrived at 8'oclock along with many people, but, STILL no stage play.

Many had grown tired till the play actually began which was an unbelievable 2 hours later. As the curtains were drawn and the stage was visible people sat on their chairs, eyes sleepily glued to the stage.

The storyline was about the problems and clashes of growing up with two different cultures. The script itself was fantastic, but the stage production had destroyed the effects of the script. Too many things had gone wrong.

To start off with, their dialogue was on a playback soundtrack. Theatre and drama is all about the performance being live on stage, not being played back on a sound track. The decision to use a playback recorded not only wrecked the live aspect but made the excellent acting useless. They mouthed every word, they used hand gestures every 2 words and the voices on the recorder sounded artificial. Adding to this, there were times when the soundtrack failed completely. But the real disappointment to me is that the acting was great, and as could be seen, all of the actors had their lines memorised. If this was the case, was there a need for a playback recorder??

Secondly, the lighting was ordinary. They made a unique but risky decision in using the spotlight for their overall lighting, and unfortunately, it didn't pay off. Spotlights are used for the purpose of 'zone acting'. This is where there is a moment where the director wants the attention of the audience withdrawn from the original scene and focused onto the brief or long moment. To achieve this spotlight is used so it is bright in one spot and the surroundings are dark. By using spotlight for most of the lighting where there is no zone acting, it drowned out the light from rest of the scene and messed up the image altogether.

Not only were these two an issue, but there were little things that built up to make the whole thing a disaster. For example, stagehands could be seen behind the curtains. Actors could be seen running madly from place to place. Props would fall down on certain occasions. The changing of scenes took way too long. All of these could be easily avoided if the director could plan and practice. There was also the annoying

placement of the projector screen above the stage showing the logo of the committee which distracted the audience from the stage. Although there was a purpose for this screen, it could have easily been turned off when not in use.

An unacceptable occurrence was when a dancing scene was taking place and the recorder momentarily collapsed. The actor collapsed with it and stopped dancing altogether. It started back up, but moments later died and the whole scene was aborted altogether with the curtains closing immediately. This reinforced their poor decision to use a soundtrack.

Many could argue this play was a total waste of time and was absolutely dreadful. Then there are people that could say this was an experimental activity. In my opinion, both of these are spot on. But to those who are disappointed at this heavily, you should treat this as an amateur approach rather than a professional play. On the night in seemed to be more of one of those school plays that went wrong. Although highlights of the play were few and far between, there were examples:

- a. The acting was brilliant, and so applause should go out to those who performed
- b. The script itself was great and something new
- c. It could be seen that there was a lot of effort put into the whole production and this really is a positive sign.

My finishing insight would have to be the one which has me most concerned. Many may not know that this play was funded by the NSW government and a representative had come to watch the play. Now, first of all, he had to wait 3 hours before the play even began and then, I commend him to the highest level for doing this, he had to sit and wince in pain through the entire play like many more of us had to do. My intentions are not to bag out this play, but the point I want to get out is:

Are we sending the right message? **You** be the judge.

(Wrivu is a member of NSW Junior Drama Ensemble)