



Oscar Wilde trials set tone for MET production

The newest production at Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre transports the audience back to the 1890s in a London courtroom where writer, poet, and liberal-minded Oscar Wilde faces trial for gross indecencies with another man.



Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre at The Warwick Theatre,

“Gross Indecency” written by Moises Kaufman and directed by Karen Paisley takes the life of Wilde and presents his protests as he faces trial for sodomy with a younger man. At the time of the trial, words like homosexual, gay, and sodomy were not used, and gross indecency was the synonym for male to male intercourse. Such acts were forbidden and perpetrators were sentenced to prison.

Scott Cox portrays Oscar Wilde in a performance that rings with such authenticity. At intermission, an audience member said she felt like she was watching and hearing Wilde in person. Point taken. Cox was magnificent as Wilde, and he builds the character to unveil the different levels of Wilde's persona as the play progresses. By the climax, Cox uncorks a torrent of pain and suffering. For a master class in acting, check out this production. Do not miss Cox as Oscar Wilde.

A strong performance comes from Alec Bridges as Lord Alfred Douglas the young recipient of Wilde's amorous passions. The part is quite difficult, but handled with some good acting and finesse. For a younger actor, Bridges demonstrates a good stage presence. Expect to see more of him in subsequent productions.



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Two other actors who delivered strong performances were Bob Paisley and Michael Scahill. They were part of the ensemble because they portrayed various characters, but they had more significant parts, especially in Act I. The others in the ensemble were good but hard to identify because their characters changed so many times through the nearly three hour play. Several of them had some really nice characterizations, but the script just did not develop the characters thoroughly.

The play is a web of lies, deceit, half-truths, etc, played out mostly inside a courtroom. The persona of Oscar Wilde remains unique and a flag-bearer for the importance of art. Wilde's life is also remembered for his persecution for his bisexual life. Even though Wilde had a wife and children, he possessed an eye for younger men—about 20 years old. His accusations and trial encompass several years and his prison sentence lasted two additional years.

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“Gross Indecency” never played Broadway but did establish sold out runs in Off-Broadway theatres and also made a Los Angeles run and was well received. Like previous productions, Karen Paisley takes on difficult shows and brings them to Kansas City audiences. This one, too, is a difficult production as viewers will see. The actors do a wonderful job of breathing life into their short snatches of characters.

The cast of “Gross Indecency” features Scott Cox as Oscar Wilde, and Alec Bridges as Lord Alfred Douglas. The rest of the cast are ensemble members and portray many parts. They are: Bob Paisley, Brent Nanney, Michael Scahill, Chris Gleeson, Tommy Waller, Jefferson Harwood, Ray Zarr, Jeremy Ragland, Gabriel Van-Dyne.

Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre at The Warwick



The production team that worked on “Gross Indecency” is led by Karen Paisley who directed and designed the production. Assisting her are: Emily Kennebeck, production manager; Will Green, stage manager & master electrician; Michelle Cowles, sound design; Gabriel Dyne, production associate; Onetta Johnson, costume mistress; Tom Zeilinski, board operator; Alex Paxton, carpenter.

“Gross Indecency” continues at Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre inside the former Warwick Theatre building. Performances continue through Sept. 29. Check the Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre website for specific dates, times, prices, and ticketing. www.metkc.org

Tags: Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre, Warwick Theatre, “Gross Indecency” review, Kansas City Theatre, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment