

The crucible – performance review

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The Crucible A joint cast from Melbourne High School and Mac. Robertson Girls' High School were recently involved in a production of Arthur Miller's The Crucible. The cast, led by Gilbert Stalinsfield as John Proctor and Greta Nash as Elizabeth Proctor, was able to captivate the audience for an the entirety of the performer. Director Anne-Marie Brownhill's interpretation of the play, while short, allowed for each actor to contribute his or her own ideas to the story without removing the overlying theme of the empowerment provided through lies and playing on people's fears.

Each actor showed a deep understanding of the plot and was able to convey the message about McCarthyism and the symbolism of the witch hunts for the way people were suspected and persecuted in the 50s when McCarthy was most influential. Miller's work successfully illustrates the parallels between the series of events that occurred in the late 1600s known as the Salem Witch Trials and the events that had been occurring during the time that The Crucible was written in the 1950s. The combined cast from Melbourne High School and Mac.

Robertson Girls' High School were incredibly impressive in their demonstration of these issues and the effects that these situations can have. Leading the female cast was Year 11 Alexandria Liistro. A shock choice for the role, Liistro understood her character and was able to portray the vindictive Abigail Williams to perfection. The seduction of John Proctor and lying to the judges appeared to come naturally in this wonderful performance, which employed the technique of realism to enable the character to be understood by the audience.

It was hard to find a member of the audience who, after seeing the play, didn't feel a sense of disgust towards the way Williams had acted throughout the plot. Liistro seemed to play on this disdain shown towards her and her character by not only the audience but also the actors on stage. She truly showed the manipulative nature of Abigail Williams. The gentle giant James Ness was very cleverly chosen to play Judge Danforth, the deputy governor of Massachusetts that presided over the Salem Witch Trials in this play. Ness' giant stature and booming voice commanded attention as he delivered a pitch-perfect performance.

The way in which Ness was able to control an entire act with his presence throughout the trials of Elizabeth Proctor, played by Greta Nash, made for very intense and enjoyable theatre. Ness was also able to convey the subtle compassion that Danforth has when he is offering Proctor the chance to save his own life by admitting to the heinous crime of devil-worshipping. The power in the delivery of every line by James Ness sent shivers through the audience and kept them interested from the first time he is seen on stage until the end of the play. The choice of costuming was very successful in portraying the true intentions of each character.

Abigail Williams was dressed in a black with a red headband, showing the evil that litters her soul, while the rest of the girls that were testifying against 'the devil' in court were wearing black with green headbands, showing the confusion and sickness that dominated their understanding of what they were doing. The green of the headbands worn by the group of girls were matched with the green light used in the first act when Betty Paris has fallen

sick due to the witchcraft that has been performed. Both John Proctor and Elizabeth Proctor wore lighter colours dominated by white and light greys.

This choice of colour was to display the purity and innocence of these two people, despite what was happening around them. Secondary characters that cared only a little bit about the witch trials that were occurring but only for selfish reasons, like Giles Corey, were placed in costumes dominated by greys to show both the good and the evil in them. The set design and direction for this interpretation of *The Crucible* was very well thought out. The early acts of the performance are dominated by a very crowded stage by both actors and props. This adds to the effect of the confusion that is intended displayed throughout the beginning of the play.

As the acts continue, it appears as though there is more and more unoccupied space on the stage to allow for the real message of the play to be conveyed through the words of the story and the performance of the actors. The stage for the final act is completely bare and very few actors are on stage at once. This set being stripped for this section was so that the raw emotion delivered through the acting was more powerful and more easily observed and understood. The set appears to be a symbol for logic and altruism. As the play continues, so does the logic and altruism displayed by any of the characters.