

# **NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD ADJUDICATION 2012 - 2013**

## **FULL LENGTH FESTIVAL**

**Group:** Writtle Cards

**Venue:** Writtle Village Hall

**Date of adj.:** 25<sup>th</sup> October 2012

**Production:** Frankenstein

**Adjudicators:** Jane Rayner and Liz Mullen

FoH.

We received a warm welcome from the team, who had to reallocate seats as the ticket numbers and the seating layout didn't match! This was settled in a friendly manner. The programme was very simple – a photocopied sheet – but it contained all the information we needed. There was a raffle but only one prize. A little disappointing. Refreshments included mulled wine, a welcome option on a chilly, autumn evening.

Set.

A good set for Frankenstein's study. A French window led to the garden, a central door to the unseen laboratory and another door to the rest of the house. There was a settee, desk and chair, bookcase and a skeleton. There were lamps placed on the furniture. Mustard walls above the dado rail and below it, brown wood. Pictures, furniture etc all looked right. A good sense of period and atmosphere.

We wondered if the revealed part of the lab could have shown a hint of a painted flat depicting what was happening in there rather than a black curtain – or the curtain could have been closer to the door frame and slit, leaving characters to part the curtains to enter the mysterious interior.

Sound and Lighting.

There were some excellent sound effects, especially during the highly charged scene when Victor smashes his equipment, and the rain and storm, although the rain stopped rather too abruptly once the actors started speaking. Fading the sound gradually would have sounded more natural.

The flashing, flickering lights added to the scary atmosphere. Music was well chosen and set the mood for what was to come.

There didn't seem to be any differentiation of the stage lighting between times of the day and the lamps were permanently on. It would have been nice if the actors had switched them on or off.

Half-lit set changes by Sophie and other maid/ASM were efficient and swift.

Costumes and make up

All appropriate to the characters and well chosen.

The creature had long hair, pale make up and red-rimmed eyes, with various stitching marks. Although his clothes were simple, I felt he could have been scruffier and dirtier. After all, he had been living rough for some time.

I felt that the gypsy costume was rather too obvious and colourful, considering the girl had been in prison for some time and was on her way to her execution. We felt that a blonde gypsy didn't look quite right.

Victor Frankenstein. Nick Caton

This is not an easy role, as Victor has to go through many emotions, from his initial excitement at his creation, through grief, fear and despair.

Nick did not use his voice well enough to show these emotions, so some of them were more believable than others. He seemed to gain confidence as the play progressed, and had a good rapport with Henry. Their dialogue scenes were well rehearsed and pacy. Although Victor's voice was not altogether pleasing, his mastery of the script was impressive and he maintained a tortured tension throughout.

Frau Frankenstein. Liz Curley

Liz was the only cast member who used an accent and this worked really well for Victor's mother. It somehow seemed to set her apart and put her in an older generation. She was bustling and bossy, beautifully dressed from head to toe in black with lots of lace. This was an excellent performance, natural and creating a fully rounded character. Her scream was the best I've ever heard. I was so impressed with that scream. I've heard the phrase "blood-curdling scream." Now I know what on sounds like! Stage screams are often laughingly pathetic, so well done, Liz.

Henry Cheval. Kenton Church

Henry was charming with a pleasant personality, even a little bland at first, but this gave Kenton to chance to effect a greater change as Henry becomes more passionate about the experiments, even as Victor is regretting his part in it.

He had a good rapport with Victor, showing their easy friendship. Kenton was often still and watchful. His emotions went from disgust, through a wavering change of opinion until he ended up fascinated by the whole idea of creating new life.

The Creature. Neil Smith

What a difficult role to play. Go too far and you have a caricature of all the cartoon monsters we've ever seen. This could have been so laughable but there were hardly any titters (on our night), even on his first entrance. This may have been due to the tense build-up from Victor and Henry, but Neil Smith grabbed not only our attention but our sympathy, too.

He got it just right. His creature spoke slowly in a deep voice, that you sensed had had little practice in speaking, becoming more eloquent as time passed. He was fascinated by his own hand, looking at it in wonderment and his movements were awkward without being too jerky. I liked the way he tilted his head and spoke Victor's name in a way that was both questioning and menacing. Sometimes before he spoke, he would turn his head very slowly and focus with intense, staring eyes, making his speeches more powerful. His anguish (especially when the lab was destroyed and his "bride" with it) was genuinely heart wrenching and he gave us a character who was more human than his creator. Truly a "noble savage" as reluctantly stated by Victor.

This character was both horrible and touching. Very well done.

Elizabeth. Sarah Wilson

This was a rather bland performance but then Elizabeth doesn't have lot to do or say, other than to be kind to Victor, without really understanding anything about what

drives this complex man. I felt that Sarah could have put more feeling into her role; it was all rather too sweet.

Sophie. Megan Hill

Initially, we felt that Sophie was too young to be playing the housekeeper but as the play progressed, she grew in confidence and gave a good performance, making her age irrelevant.

Ernst. Daniel Curley

Daniel always delivers a good performance and as Ernst he was the upright and pompous policeman, slightly subservient to the family but obviously someone who knows them well. He conveyed suspicion and spoke in deep, ringing tones. An authority figure.

Justine. Clare Williams

A small role, but Clare showed her fear and emotion and squealed very realistically.

Conclusion

This was a good production with some excellent performances.

One or two minor prompts were delivered discreetly and unobtrusively.

We felt that the flashback did not work very well. We understood what was happening but it needed a dramatic lighting change or some clearer way to let the audience know. Possibly Victor's lines spoken in a blackout so that he could at least have some quick costume change, removing a jacket perhaps? Having read the script, possibly the fault lies with the author.

The direction of the Creature was very good, bringing out the pathos as well as the horror.

In my notes I wrote the word "Anguish!" For me, it sums up what this play shows us about the characters. Victor is tormented mentally by what he's done, his mother is grief stricken for young William, and the Creature has distress and anger for his condition and his future.

Thank you for inviting us to a thought provoking play and best wishes for your next production.

Jane Rayner

Liz Mullen