

Review

The Memory of Water

By Shelagh Stephenson

Produced by Emma Slater

Production: March 2008

Memory of Water was staged over three days at St Andrew's Church in Roundhay and was produced by Emma Slater.

Mother is dead. And it is left to the three orphaned daughters to arrange the funeral, pick up the pieces and move on. As the story unfolds we see that each daughter is significantly messed up in their own way, forming a cruel legacy to their Mother's own various insecurities.

Theresa, the eldest daughter, carries the burden of being 'the responsible one' (as elder siblings often do), and Linda Nicholson ably portrays this repressed frustration at her sisters, most notably in an ugly confrontation once a tipple or five has loosened her tongue.

Catherine, the youngest daughter, has inherited her mother's love of partying, each fuelled by their craving for attention as they are continually excluded from what goes on around them, and Kim Tomlin expertly captures Catherine's ceaseless, erratic crusade to be noticed at any cost!

And Mary, the middle daughter, whose life has been torn between the desire to make her parents proud and forge a successful career whilst having to give up a son born through teen-pregnancy. Stella Wallace's character forms the central lynchpin to the play, culminating in an emotive out-pouring of grief when she realises that her illegitimate son died years ago and nobody had the courage to say.

Mary is tormented by recurring dreams of her Mother, Violet – played by Andrea Varnavides – who glides like an echo from the golden age of cinema through the scenes that she is in.

A well-judged performance, especially the soliloquy on the despair of her progressive Alzheimer's condition. The lighting for these scenes is inspired, remarkably capturing the subliminally surreal world that dreams inhabit, and the choice of musical 'standards' provides suitable accompaniment.]

Rob Butler is good as Mary's uncomfortably out-of-place 'married man', and Paul Byrne is equally strong as Frank (a good choice of name since the character is less than communicative!).

The cast uniformly support the rather macabre comedy of the play, resulting in a good production, well directed and performed.

Chris Hoyle