



News, Analysis and Comment

THEATRE REVIEW: Hobson's Choice, 3 Big Men Productions/The Rehearsal Room (Melbourne)

by Chris Thorpe

Arts Hub

Friday, June 13, 2008



3 Big Men Productions' *Hobson's Choice* by Harold Brighouse – directed by Richard Sarell (from *The Rehearsal Room*) – tells the tale of Hobson, a bourgeois alcoholic who lets his business slide, dominates his daughters, abuses his drinking mates and falls down a cellar, inebriated.

The setting is mostly Hobson's boot shop in Chapel Street, Prahran. Hobson decides to marry off two of his daughters, Vicky (Kate Douglas) and Alice (Ami-Lou Sharpe).

He claims, however, that Maggie (a captivating Caroline Lloyd), his eldest daughter, is - at the age of 30 - far too old for marriage. Maggie then takes matters into her own hands. She forces Willie Mossop, a skilled boot maker in the employ of Hobson, to marry her and open a competing shop of their own on South Yarra Station. Soon Hobson realises that life is utterly impossible without Willie and Maggie, begs them to return. Maggie agrees, but on the condition that he turns the business over to herself and Willie.

The cast formed a fun and tight-knit ensemble, with the terrific Peter McTighe as the painfully shy Willie. Ian Rooney (who seems to be appearing in everything on stage of late) is alright as Hobson and honourable mentions must go to the talented Ezra Bix and Ian Smith for their performances as Mr. Phillip Coleman and Doctor McFarlane respectively.

As undesirable as alcoholism and domestic abuse are, we should confess that we've grown a bit pious about them, and if we can't find humour somewhere in the dark side of life, we've lost something. On the other hand, most of whatever sympathy we have for Hobson depends on the character's amplitude and just how funny an actor can make him.

Sarell's cracking production of this old evergreen hardly puts a foot wrong. Having said this, the production lacked proper design and the costuming was inadequate and mismatched - but these are minor quibbles.

The performances were very entertaining, more than once producing bursts of laughter from audience members. It is productions like these that deserve a greater appreciation, not to mention greater funding. It all adds up to a near-perfect evening of entertainment! Where were the Green Room Award committee?

Hobson's Choice, Harold Brighouse (1915)
Chapel off Chapel, Prahran, Melbourne
29 May – 14 June 2008
(130 minutes including 1 interval)



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