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A Perfect Likeness | Conn Artists Theatre Company | Review

“Oozes humour and drama alike”

Conn Artists Theatre Company
Monday 30 August 2021
Victoria Institute, Arundel

A Perfect Likeness sees two of England’s finest composers of literature come together for a theatre show like no other, as a Mr [Charles Dickens](#) and [Lewis Carroll](#) (Real name Charles Dodgson) meet face-to-face for the first time in this enthralling encounter, set in Oxford, 1866.

The audience were so engrossed within the clash of these two powerful writers that it was so easy to forget this is a fictitious scenario, superbly written by playwright [Daniel Rover Singer](#), founder of the [Reduced Shakespeare Company](#). Despite being a fictitious product of his imagination the characteristics of both counterparts shine through so powerfully, that it isn’t unconvincing for a second. I was warmed by [David Stephen](#)’s portrayal of a loud, egotistic and boisterous Dickens, who was extremely witty and always engaging. Not only was his acting on point, I had to rub my eyes and blink twice to check that I wasn’t actually standing in a room with the real master of storytelling.

The beauty of this piece is born within the deeply revealing storytelling that offers the audience unique insights into some of the pair’s deepest challenges and creative processes, as well as the harsh contrast between the two of them. [Ross Muir](#) expertly plays a mannered, clerical and nervous young Lewis Carroll, and their wildly contrasting personalities produces so many terrific and dramatic moments that it oozes humour and drama alike.

At its heart this piece is a light-hearted comedy exploring imagination to create a hypothetical scenario which as an audience member you just wish was true. We were also treated to many comical poems, anecdotes and extracts from their rich written works as well as some dramatic reading by Dickens, as the two bounce off one another, ever curious to find out how the other one works.

As we get deeper into the play like Alice underground, we start to see the darker sides of both of their stories. The play delves into Carroll’s obsession with children, revealing his outlook towards his inspirations for his most famous story. And Dickens reveals a secret love affair that he has shared with no-one else in life. The play views the pairs shortcomings without being judgmental, not shying away from the controversial subjects but bringing them to light and showing them in a different revealing way. Within such a short space of time the two form a close and great friendship, benefitting one another through their starkly contrasting views on life.

I always love watching [The Conn Artists Theatre Company](#), (derived from my local [Connaught Theatre in Worthing](#)), over the last few years the team have grown from producing and performing great one nighters in Worthing to now UK-wide tours, with funding and support from [Arts Council England](#), because they bring a fantastic standard of theatre and storytelling as a small but very experienced troupe.

Regular Director [Nick Young](#), who’s previous work includes the Royal Shakespeare company, working with prolific artists such as Patrick Stewart and Dame Helen Mirren, returns to the scene on A Perfect Likeness to bring his vast experience to the show. [Matthew Pike](#) returns as Production Manager and Lighting Designer and [Laura Kimber](#) on Set and Costumes Design. Together they create a stunning set, based in Dodgson’s Oxford lodgings, which included large tilted objects from a full bookcase to the backdrop of the walls themselves to reflect Carrolls unusual and original outlook on life. Projected images fill the show with an extra element that beautifully illustrates Carroll’s works throughout, as there is never a dull moment.

Seeing it at the 40-seat [Victoria Institute in Arundel](#) was a fantastically cosy and intimate experience that helped us as the audience feel so close and engrossed within the story. My favourite moment was when Dickens and Carroll engaged in a pretend sword fight with a walking stick and umbrella as they discussed their vastly different takes on the works of William Shakespeare.

You don’t need to have a great understanding of the writers to enjoy this richly rewarding, educational and thoroughly entertaining piece of theatre. You can catch A Perfect Likeness on tour until Friday 24th September 2021, full details can be found at [conn-artists.co.uk](#). A Perfect Likeness can be seen in the South East at the [E M Forster Theatre](#) on September 15th and The Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond on September 17th.

Reviewer: [Stephen Sheldrake](#)

