

Spider's Web by Maitland Repertory Theatre - Review by Genevieve Graham

'A web of lies and red herrings'

Spider's Web is an Agatha Christie 'whodunit' but not as we know it. The complex web of lies, truths, clues and red herrings had my head spinning to discover the killer before the essential reveal.

Agatha Christie is a name known throughout the world for her enthralling murder mystery novels and stories. Her brilliantly developed characters and clever plots make her books a joy to read but also a challenge for the "little grey cells." As a devotee to all things Christie, I came to Maitland Repertory Theatre's production of *Spider's Web* with high expectations. I was welcomed by a set styled with antique furniture, gold framed artworks and leather-bound books. There's no doubt I'm about to enjoy watching a murderous romp in a manor house within the English countryside. The set designer and director Jessica Gray is in fact making her directorial debut. The set is well-considered with a high attention to detail, as I've come to expect from the Repertory Theatre.

Gray has taken up the challenge of directing a well-known play with a large cast and has not disappointed. This comedy thriller combines the stress of disposing of a body with a comedy of errors that ensues. Madeline Valentinis plays Clarissa, the lady of the house. She has the poise of a beautiful doting wife but also a dark undercurrent from reading too many murder mysteries within the safety of her humdrum life. When an unwelcome guest arrives named Oliver, played by Alexander Murray, her life will never be the same. This cast gets the comedy within this play and has the audience laughing as Clarissa's fantasy world becomes real life drama that hits a lot harder than she expects. Valentinis has brought Clarissa's charisma and charm to the fore and created a character I want to see succeed in convincing the police and her accessories to murder that she has everything under control. One such accessory is Richard Rae who plays Jeremy. Rae appears at home on stage and plays his enthusiastic, loveable and slightly fumbling role with ease. No Agatha Christie story would be complete without staff listening at keyholes and tirelessly squabbling between themselves. Dimity Eveleens plays Elgin who is one such staff member. She is hilariously ready to lay her mistress's head on the chopping block to save her own skin. Her lack of dedication is balanced by the love for Clarissa shown by Molly South who plays her stepdaughter, Pippa. At 11 years old South steals the show and is someone to watch.

This play is unlike other Agatha Christie stories as we follow the plot of a murder mystery that becomes a fanciful story of tall tales shaped by the mind of a lover of murder mystery stories. It's wonderfully clever.

It's the lovely little details in this play that really stand out. The gold web above the hallway door, the spider on the belt of Clarissa's dress and how she hums Incy Wincy Spider before she discovers a corpse. It's these little details that keep me grounded in a story that has more lies spun through it than I can keep track of. The wonderful performances keep me giggling and unconcerned with my lack of memory in the plot details. It's these details that constantly shift and change as the play develops. Watch this play and try to keep track of the lies in *Spiders Web* and have a chuckle at the dead weight jokes along the way.

