A Library Theatre Company Production of

I Ought To Be In Pictures

By Neil Simon
Directed by Paul Jepson
Reviewed by Temi Ogunye on 12th Feb 2010

The Library Theatre Company's production of '**I Ought to be in Pictures**' faithfully captures the sharp wit and touching emotion of Neil Simon's 30 year old three character comedy-drama.

Exploring themes of love, guilt and abandonment the play begins with the unexpected arrival of Libby (Kirsty Osmon) back into the life of the father who walked out on their New York family sixteen years ago. Claiming to be in search of what she is 'owed' – a leg-up in the film industry, Libby's arrival is a catalyst for change; not only the transformation of both her and her father, but also for a reassessment of Herb's (Stuart Fox) on/off relationship with Steffy (Elizabeth Carling), his long-suffering girlfriend of two years.

The detailed domestic environment draws one into the unkempt world of the tragic out-of-work screenwriter Herb. The subtle but convincing hint at the outside world heightens the sense of intimacy between audience and cast, intensifying our awareness of the complex dynamics and various tensions of the relationships.

The events of the play rely to a large extent on the plausible likeability of Herb; his character is undoubtedly the apex around which the trajectories of these women turn. Implied by the fact of his three previous marriages and prominent sexuality, Herb's attractiveness is delivered convincingly by Fox's charm and youthful ebullience. Indeed the audience soon find themselves forgiving him of his parental neglect and other shortcomings.

Notably, the production ends with Herb working with gusto at his previously abandoned typewriter, a symbolic image of his new found enthusiasm for life. Transformed from a hunched, struggling screenwriter to an energetic and inspired father, his enthusiastic final scene contrasts significantly with his sleepy first appearance, in which we are told he could not function without a cup of coffee in the morning and depended on sleeping pills at night. Now surrounded by his freshly decorated flat, one feels that his daughter has literally been a breath of

fresh air, not only on stage, but in his stale personal life. Fox plays the role with expert subtlety and theatrical maturity, I challenge any theatre goer to resist laughing at his witty quips and from shedding a tear at his remorse.

My one criticism of the play, therefore, lies not with Herb, but with the slight overacting of the youngest cast member. She is perhaps brought into a harsher light when held up against her emotional rival, Steffy. Though Osmon's performance is good, the contrast between Steffy's soothing, assured femininity and Libby's bolshy and boyish over-confidence is somewhat reflective of the differing experience levels of the two actresses. Steffy is a calming and constant feature around which the other two characters go on their transformative journeys. With her perfectly made hair (even, curiously, immediately after Herb interrupts their sex), immaculate dress sense and desire for more commitment from Herb, Steffy is no two-dimentional cliché, but a strong, confident and intelligent woman.

In contrast, Libby is played, perhaps self-consciously, like a young Jodie Foster; though it is not clear to what extent her boyishness was a directorial decision taken due to Osmon's striking androgyny. The references to Libby's conversations with her dead grandma serve to suggest a wisdom and insight that Osmon's timing portrays well.

Touching, insightful and hilarious, *'I Ought to be in Pictures'* is a must see!