The Rocky Horror Show at Opera House

Reviewed by Matthew Dougall October 2016

It has been a very long time since I last saw this particular show live, and I had forgotten exactly how enjoyable an experience it can be. It really is a two-way theatrical experience with many of the audience wearing costume and make-up, and bringing along torches, newspapers and other such paraphernalia to be used at time-honoured places in this cult show. They also bring with them well-known responses or even some well-placed heckles and ad-libs which the cast simply have to work with. This is a show that, very much like the sing-a-long *Sound Of Music*, is something of a phenomenon. You either get with it, or get lost!

The show is, quite unbelievably, over 40 years old, and yet it is still as fresh and as entertaining as it was (probably) back then. Written by **Richard O'Brien**, this is a Rock Musical and total spoof of the Hollywood Horror B-Movie genre, and a massive send-up and glorification of transvestitism. All the cast at some point get to wear stockings and suspenders and it is high sexual camp from start to finish.

The show opens to a glorious lush pink curtain and the Usherette singing her opening song assuring the audience that this is nothing more than 'Science Fiction'. The next scene though, disappoints set-wise, with a cardboard cut-out of an oversized car and a much smaller cardboard-cut out castle. Once we arrive inside the castle however, the set is wonderful. The red panelled interior with stuffed animal heads and other such reliquiae, and the simple turning of the panels to reveal a laboratory full of large and frightening instruments was absolutely fabulous. And the inspired, clever idea of a film strip along the top of the set and putting the orchestra behind this was genius.

The acting, especially from **Liam Tamne** as Frank-N-Furter was much more overt and pantomimic than in previous incarnations I have seen. It took a while for me to become accustomed to this extreme reptilian interpretation, but once I did, I was carried away along with the rest of the audience and enjoyed it for all its worth.

In fact, the whole show was a little different. But surely that is the nature of Musicals. You cannot expect an exact replica of the film or your last experience, since this is a different cast and a different director and so their ideas will have some impact on the production as a whole. And as a whole, it was a highly uplifting and joyous occasion.

Haley Flaherty and **Richard Meek** played Brad and Janet, the ordinary couple who find refuge from the storm and a flat tyre in Frankie's 'Count Dracula' style castle; whilst the rather unconventional occupants of said castle make sure that their relationship and sexuality are questioned and changed. These are, along with Tamne as Frankie; Magenta (
Kay Murphy
), Columbia (
Sophie Linder-Lee
) and putting in the performance of a lifetime,
Kristian Lavercombe
as Riff-Raff. Frankie's lab-made plaything, Rocky (
Dominic Anderson
) certainly had the body, but his singing was less proficient than the others [also, I didn't understand the need for hand-held mics].

Things don't go according to plan, as another human living in sin chez Transilvanians is Eddie, who is chased around the stage with a chainsaw and murdered by Frankie. This is the turning point in the show, the cathartic moment when the aliens realise that their leader is out of control, and they need to find a way of overthrowing him and returning to their planet. This is escalated by the arrival of Dr. Scott, eminent scientist and alien-hunter, and although wheelchair-bound and old (very youthful in this production!) still manages to help the aliens make good their plans and returning back to their world. I think Rocky virgins - sorry, make that - those who have never seen the show before, would have had some difficulty in following the plot, despite the most personable and genial character of this production's Narrator, Charlie Condou. He actually made the show for me. His genuine congeniality and not being afraid to tell the audience that their hackles are making him forget his lines just made the show all the funnier and more 'human'; with the best ad-lib I have ever heard coming half way through from Condou, "This is as good as it gets for me. You should have seen some of the other shit I've been in!"

Directed by **Christopher Luscombe**, Musical Direction by **Ben Van Tienen**, and choreography by **Nathan M. Wright**, these three made a highly enjoyable, frisky, risque and fast-paced cult Musical that will ensure its

continued success.