

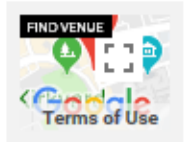
Volpone

Fri 3rd – Sun 26th August 2018

REVIEWS

TIME OF THE NEXT PERFORMANCE: 18:35

VENUE: **Paradise in Augustine's**



Ed Strang

at 22:09 on 8th Aug 2018

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

0 AGREES

0 DISAGREES

You know the smell of the cinema? That sickly sweet popcorn and pick 'n' mix scent that takes you straight back to the giddy excitement of the cinema as a kid? The one that is synonymous with late evenings, bottomless Malteasers and Tango Ice Blast? I love that smell. Well, this theatre also had a smell: the smell of disappointment and regret.

I was disappointed to learn before the show that this production of Ben Johnson's 'Volpone' had not been abridged. This may be considered sacrilege given that I have a degree in English Literature - how dare I demand the bastardisation of Johnson's masterful and mellifluous language? - but it transpired that I was right to have my doubts. If it were a professional production it would be fair to call for my head. This production was far from professional though. In fact, it was about as amateur as you can get.

The evening's lashings of sacrilege did not come from my end, but rather came from the fact that Johnson's prose was not utilised as the point of comedy. The production instead relied on slapstick, pantomime comedy to force laughs from the audience, with the actors simply not skilled enough to manipulate the script for their own comedic purposes. Insinuations of homosexuality and various lascivious activities are the focus of the comedy in this performance, a saddening fact for any fan of literature. The physical comedy is lazy, bordering on desperate at times.

The cast lacked even a basic understanding of theatre: side characters stole the limelight from the speaking roles by pissing about during speeches, with one character inexplicably choosing to mime the narrator's speech as if translating it into sign language. This served only to distract the audience, drawing attention away from the orator and the plot and directing it towards the attention leech at the side of the stage.

It is clear though that a lot of effort went into the production. The set was well designed (apart from the bed which fell apart as soon as Volpone lay on it, drawing the biggest laugh of the night) and the actors performed with commendable aplomb. A good show, however, must rely on more than a well-memorised script to entertain an audience. Sitting through this performance was definitely a slog, and I am certain that there are far better and more entertaining shows on at the Fringe this year. It is a passable attempt at theatre - nothing was disastrously wrong, but I cannot recommend that you waste an evening watching this show.

AGREE

DISAGREE



Megan Luesley

at 22:51 on 8th Aug 2018

★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

0 AGREES

0 DISAGREES

When you think of a typical Fringe show, a two and a half hour performance of a show from the early 17th century isn't exactly what comes to mind. But a long show isn't a bad thing, provided it uses that time well to keep the audience engaged; this show did not. Arbery Productions' 'Volpone', despite some pretty good individual performances, failed to keep up the energy.

We open up with Volpone (played with gusto by Alastair Lawless) pretending to be on his deathbed in order to have Venice's rich shower him with gifts in the hope that he'll name them as his heir, aided by sharp-witted maidservant Mosca (Vanashree Thapliyal). Lawless and Thapliyal both relish their roles, although the banter between them could have been quicker and more energetic. Making Mosca female was a smart touch - as well as allowing her to play up stereotypes of female vulnerability, it also allows Volpone to occasionally get too handsy, foreshadowing Mosca's own scheming later on.

In general, this show is filled with people having great fun playing caricatures. Standouts include Kate Cottam's grand dame, Lady Would-be, with Mike Brownsell as her lisping Mad Hatter-esque husband. The individual performances are not where the production's faults lie - it's the show itself.

There are some times when an injection of energy is needed. When three people are onstage to form a crowd, it's painful enough. When those three people just stand in a line, occasionally piping up with a scripted sound only to immediately fall silent or into mime, it's excruciating. The big group scenes when people didn't know what to do with themselves were by far the weakest point.

Jonson originally wrote 'Volpone' as a scathing satire, and in general the play has aged like milk. Take Celia, played by Polina Sulim, who is hardly audible at the start due to her whimpering. It's not Sulim's fault, and near the end of the play she tries to infuse Celia with a bit of off-script defiance, but it can't save the fact that Jonson wrote her to have about as much spine as a soggy lettuce leaf, and Celia garners that much sympathy. And a lot of the comedy just falls flat here. Maybe if the cast played up the farcical side, such as when Mosca jokes about smothering Volpone while he's pretending to be ill, there would be more laughs.

Credit to Lada Sotirova the costume designer, however - they were excellently done, each perfectly portraying these exaggerated characters, and stage manager Staci Shaw deserves to be commended for the set.

It seems to be a shame, because everyone involved in 'Volpone' obviously put their very best into it, and it isn't any individual's failing. But it doesn't all gel together, and the script hasn't endured very long on its own merits. Fans of classical texts might appreciate this adaptation, but it's a real Fringe anomaly, and with a running time of 2 hours 20 minutes plus an interval, you'll need a serious interest to endure it.

AGREE

DISAGREE

Audience Avg. ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

0 votes, 0 comments



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