

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Review: The Cherry Orchard (****)



Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* adapted for Theatre Alba by Jo Clifford, is a very good serious play which had an added dimension as this production was staged outdoors.

There are of course risks associated with the weather which can mean that audiences will stay away if rain is forecast, and midges can be a nuisance but insect repellent was supplied! However the beautiful setting of Duddingston Kirk

Manse Gardens, the huge stage area – including lawns, trees, paths, hedges and Duddingston Loch – and the very good quality of acting made for an excellent evening's entertainment.

There are facets of an open air production that cannot be reproduced in an indoor production like hearing a voice or a hammering sound from the distance and the actors had many entry and exit points which they used.

Theatre Alba, the amateur group, directed by Charles Nowosielski, has been in existence for 30 years and, for 12 of those, has been using the Manse Gardens for drama during the Fringe. This has resulted in many memorable productions in the past and there are plans for the future too.

The play started in the late evening before dusk and after the interval continued in the dark with some basic ground-based floodlighting. The premise behind the drama is that Madam Ranevskaya, owner of the Cherry Orchard, is bankrupt after throwing all her money behind and it must be sold. She resists but fate takes its turn for which she cannot escape. The players could easily be heard on the calm night the reviewer attended, and the musical accompaniment coming from the tent at the side was beautiful and appropriate. Particular praise should be given to Robin Thomson for his portrayal of Fiers, an 87 year old downtrodden valet, yearning after the imperialistic days when all was 'well'.

Speaking to the audience in the interval, there was praise for the production with one lady saying that it was very close in quality to a professionally staged production indoors. Whilst the budget would not allow for an elaborate wardrobe, the costumes were appropriate for the production.

This play was very well worth seeing and The Reporter will be looking out for future productions from this drama group.