

Edinburgh Festival Fringe REVIEW – The Diary of Anne Frank ****



The Diary of Anne Frank, Theatre Alba, Duddingston Kirk Gardens until 25 August.

The loch-side gardens of Duddingston Kirk Manse might sound like an unlikely venue for a production of The Diary of Anne Frank but the simple stage, hemmed in by a concentration camp gate and fencing, evokes the requisite sense of both confinement and ever-present danger. Only the audience know how the story ends as the Frank and van Dann families arrive at their new home, a cramped, secret annex above offices in Amsterdam, with the strong-willed, fun-loving and creative Anne bouncing through the apartment oblivious to the difficulties that lie ahead and the danger she and her family are in. Anne is played by a young woman (Andrea Mackenzie) but she convinces as a child and we see the action mainly through her innocent eyes, as unseen to the two families, Nazis patrol the outside streets. All of the protagonists know that betrayal or detection are constant possibilities and that the trains of Jews leaving for the east can only be for elimination. But we also see heroism in humanity, mainly in the shape of Miep Gies (Amy Conway, also excellent) who shelters the families and brings food and news, and who also narrates parts of the tale from Anne's precious diaries.



Anne (Andrea Mackenzie) writes her diary as Miep (Amy Conway) looks on

The families attempt to continue life as normally as possible. Hanukkah is celebrated and presents exchanged. Anne squabbles with, then grows close to, the van Dann's son, Peter. But as the months go by the tension mounts and the friction between family members increases. News of the Normandy invasion brings joy and huge relief but we know it has come too late. As daylight fades around us, the tragic denouement of their betrayal unfolds to a background of darkness. Only Otto, Anne's father, survives. As the curtain falls he documents the last sightings of his family and their fate. We are reminded of the full horror of war and the price paid by the innocent, and it is genuinely moving.

Theatre Alba have a long tradition of performing classic stories, such as Chekhov, along with traditional Scots plays. Like Communicado and 7:84 the feeling is of a company by the people of Scotland for the people of Scotland, and their commitment to serious drama is evident. This is a company to be cherished and this production is a particular success.

Reviewer Ronald Orr