

Saturday Night,
by Alexander Brown - Sunday, 27 February 2011, 12:43 A
Reflection on seeing *Hearts Desire*

Not to start on a negative note, but I didn't overly enjoy this play. It was the strangest thing too; I had read the script and thought it was brilliant, but when I saw it on Saturday night I was kind of disappointed. Starting out it seemed fine, the characters seemed portrayed younger than the script says, but I got over that. I tried so hard to like this performance, but in the end - right down to the end as a matter of fact - I really didn't like it.

This play was not at all what I imagined from when I read the script. I imagined the characters less animated, more relaxed. It was quieter, and less funny. I took it the script maybe a little too analytical, but something about old people saying these lines seemed less energetic, and more serious. I liked that there was comedy on stage; it just seemed at points that it was over done, lines that I read and had emotional and serious meaning were overrun with laughter from the audience. I pictured Brian older, and less mean; even though it is clear from the script that he and Alice were on bad terms most of the time, he never came across as mean and hateful. I especially hated the deliverance of the lines "you are my heart's desire". It was the creepiest thing and again I didn't see that in the script; watching this play made me feel like I missed a huge meaning of the play. It's all up to interpretation, but this one was so far from mine that I almost thought I had the wrong idea all along.

What I did enjoy about the play was the "re-wind" effect on stage; it was done well and it gave a comedy to the play that the script did not. It was more or less what I imagined while reading the play and the actors performed it well. The direction of this play was going towards situational comedy in the sense that the play was only funny because of what was taking place after the "re-wind". I don't think it's the direction I would have gone with, this play seemed like a chance to showcase a unique form of storytelling; in my opinion making it a comedy makes the play lose the special effect that Churchill wrote into it. This was supposed to be an interesting experience and instead felt like a farce. I would like to point out at this point that at no time did I find the acting bad; all of the actors did great with the direction they were given, I just wasn't a fan of the outcome.

Something that didn't quite seem right about this play was the scene where Brian eats himself; it was somewhat disturbing and about half way through it became boring. I remember this scene in the script, but never imagined the scene on stage like that. Again this felt to me like a point where Brian gets to express himself with a meaningful monologue, but it was played down as just weird by having him eat himself and then both the women shriek at the end. I also felt like I didn't quite understand the relationship between Brian and Susy, besides the fact that he is her father and she is his daughter; there was this underlying tone during the performance that Brian had sexually molested Susy at some point. I got that feeling when she arrived home and he delivered the lines "you are my heart's desire", at that point I had this really bad feeling about letting Brian near her. I didn't get this tone at all when reading the script; I picked up on the obviously fractured relationship the two had from what was written, but this creepy molestation tone never once crossed my mind.

What I found interesting about this performance was what it was extremely different from what I had read. Direction is everything in a play, and the direction of this play was so far from the play I had read that I almost thought it was a different play. It's interesting how we interpret things like scripts; we have this preconceived notion that we know what the play is all about when we have read it, but then it's presented in front of you and all of your preconceptions are blown away. You have been taken to a world that you didn't know existed and it can be scary; diving into the unknown is frightening, especially when you were so sure you knew what was coming. *Heart's Desire* was an experience I will never forget, but hey you can't always enjoy everything you do, and I'm glad I finally went to a play that I didn't love; I was starting to feel repetitive.

Chosen by Emily Cochrane because:

I thought Alex's response to "Heart's Desire" was an enlightening one because I focused on the little details of the performance to justify his opinions. He also compared his experience reading the script to seeing the play, which caught my attention because it showed me that he was taking the time to think about what he had seen and what he wanted to say.

For example, "This play was not at all what I imagined from when I read the script. I imagined the characters less

animated, more relaxed. It was quieter, and less funny. I took it the script maybe a little too analytical, but something about old people saying these lines seemed less energetic, and more serious." This was a helpful explanation as it gave me the chance to enter into his head and consider what he was saying (even though I hadn't actually read the script). Alex also elaborated on this last point: "I pictured Brian older, and less mean; even though it is clear from the script that he and Alice were on bad terms most of the time, he never came across as mean and hateful." This description helps me to once again understand where he's coming from. Because he took the time to explain everything he was saying, I found his post to be very helpful and enlightening.

Black Comedy Production

by Adam Washburn - Thursday, 24 March 2011, 01:04 AM

I saw the matinee production of Black Comedy on Saturday at the Imperial Theatre in Saint John. When I read Black Comedy, I found the script to be very funny so I was excited to see this production. I was satisfied with the humor in the production at first but it seemed to drag on after a little while. There seemed to have been jokes that were added into the production which were not in the script. These jokes were funny yet they were repeated to the point where they lost their humor. An example of this was the constant groping of body parts done by the characters as they were trying to find their way around the house. At first this joke made me laugh but over time its humor began to fade.

I felt that these added in attempts at humor almost drew away from the script and the writing seemed to have gotten lost in the midst of it all. An example of this was Miss Furnival falling all over the place when she was sneaking drinks from the drink trolley. It was funny yet she was making a lot of noise, which took my attention away from the major events that were going on.

I think it would have been hard to act a character in this play. The amount of focus that the actors had was impressive. Trying to fake that it is dark would be a hard thing to do on stage and I give the actors a thumbs up for doing this. I also felt that the actors did a good job presenting their characters. They did seem to play their characters a bit over the top yet this did fit in well with the way the production was envisioned. I liked the character of Miss. Furnival because I felt that she portrayed a very comedic drunk. I had to laugh when she came out towards the end ranting on about nothing.

The set was much like I imagined it when reading the script. One thing that I was unsure about being portrayed clearly was the scene with Brindsley and Clea upstairs in bed. It was interesting to see that they had the bed standing upright. This was an interesting touch to this scene and it presented a clear point of focus for the audience. If the bed were flat on the ground it would have been hard to hear the actors as well as follow what was going on during this scene.

Another thing I was curious about before going to see the play was how they were going to present Brindsley's sculpture. I thought they did a good job by making it look like something that came out of the garbage dump. This made the scene with the electrician even more funny and added to the outrageousness of the production.

Some stage directions I thought could have been presented clearer. One in particular was the breaking of the Buda statue. To me this is a climax in the plot and I did not see it clearly because it was performed upstage behind the actors. I think this scene should have been brought down more towards the audience so we could have gotten a clearer picture on what broke and it's importance.

Another stage direction that I would have done differently was the one where Mr. Bamberger fell down into the cellar. When he fell off the stage he fell away from the door instead of in front of it. The reason for this was because the ladder was in the way of the door. I think someone should of made a point to move that ladder so Bamberger could of fallen in the right place. Small decisions like this, I find, make a big difference in a production.

Overall I did enjoy the production of Black Comedy although the humor, at times, was pushed too far it still ended up to being a interesting production to see.

Chosen by Emily Cochrane because:

What caught me eye about Adam's post on "Black Comedy" was that he talked about things that I myself hadn't really considered after seeing a play. For instance, he discussed how difficult he thought it would have been to be a character in "Black Comedy," and the amount of focus the actors had while performing. This made me realize that when I see a play, I focus on the characters and not so much the actors behind the character, other than to think that they're doing well or poorly.

Another interesting part of Adam's post was when he talked about how he would present many of the stage directions differently. I'm not an actor myself, so that's something I would absolutely never stop to think about myself. I think

that's why his post was so interesting to me - because it was different than the norm and it challenged to think about areas I would have not considered otherwise.

In comparison to Alex's post on "Heart's Desire," I found that both Adam and Alex used a lot of details and reasons to back themselves up, which made their posts both very convincing.

Attending Black comedy

by Matthew Goodwin - Saturday, 26 March 2011, 11:32 AM

The performance of black comedy was humorous, which (I believe) was the primary goal in the production process. But I do not believe the performance was funny for the correct reasons. I will be honest, I really enjoyed the script when I had first read it and as a result could not wait to see the stage performance. After seeing the performance I felt as if the entire thing was a tad distracting. I'm not sure if I have conjured the correct word to describe my thoughts on the performance, so I will attempt to explain what I mean. The entire time I was watching the performance I felt as if every single actor on the stage was basically begging for the audience's attention, of course this is easily missed as they are supposed to be in darkness the entire time, but I feel like they used the darkness as an excuse to get away with over the top movements that really shifted the focus away from the actor who was speaking. That was the main problem I faced while watching the show, I felt as if I could not concentrate on much of the dialogue because there was always an actor, acting ridiculously to get a laugh from the crowd. This seemed somehow wrong to me because in any other performance (at least one in which the actors were illuminated to one another) this sort of onstage behavior would not have been tolerated by the director, and would have been promptly corrected.

I believe this is one of the main reasons I enjoyed reading the script so much more than I enjoyed the live performance, it was not being performed in front of me. In the script, the actions which add to the hilarity of the overall piece are separated from the text so it allows the reader to appreciate the text as well as picturing the actions which add to the comedic instances within the piece. Unfortunately, once you add in the sounds of actors bumping into furniture, the roaring laughter of a crowd who came on a whim, and doesn't fully care about the text in question, (and that is not the audience's fault, as I said before, the cast seemed as if they were begging for laughter from the audience even if the focus was supposed to be on one character specifically) you find yourself lost in a sea of noise that blocks out so much of the dialogue that many of the characters become almost entirely useless to the plot. I'm not sure if it was an off night, but I also found the crowd a bit rude, talking permeated the performance almost the entire time, so much so, that I noticed the actors had to heighten the projection of their voices in order to resist getting drowned out by the crowd.

As awful as it sounds, I don't really have all that much good to say about the performance, I guess I just felt let down after enjoying the script so much, although (when applicable) the actors did do a very good job of making their plight believable, having refrained from making eye contact with other actors and constantly navigating the set as if they were blind. The use of accents was also effective and I found it added a lot more to the performance, rather than taking away from it with accents that were poorly done.

As I addressed in my response to reading the script, I had felt as if having so many actors on stage at once could pose a problem when trying to focus one's attention on one actor, I feel as if those concerns were justified as there was way too much going on to fix our attention to the character speaking, without being distracted by someone bumping into a drink cart and sending it clattering to the floor (I hope Mrs. Furnival was alright!)

None of this is to take away from the actors, as I believe they did the best with what the text gave them to work with; I think perhaps it would make a better book than a theatrical piece.

Chosen by Kirsten Graham because:

I found Matthew gave a good description of seeing the play and it made me feel like I was there. I did not read the play and I found the way he explained it very well done. I liked how he explained what he found more enjoyable to read than watch and why. It makes complete sense that it would be frustrating to watch a play where the actors seem to be almost begging the audience for laughter and that the audience was almost rude, making it difficult for him to engage in the play. I just found Matthew's overall review easy to follow and intriguing to learn from. What I mean by intriguing is that it made me feel like I understood where he was coming from even though I had not read or seen this play.

Chemistry on stage

by Juliana Duque - Thursday, 24 February 2011, 07:13 PM

Now the whole thing makes sense. The play is extremely absurd, and this is reinforced with the actors' performances as well. When you can see all the pieces together the script isn't confusing anymore, it is just the most absurd comedy I have seen. It was extremely comical. The director also adds interesting details everywhere. The one I remember the most is when the two actors that play Mrs. Drudge and Simon Gascoyne are setting up the table. While Mrs. Drudge is setting it up, Simon Gascoyne is taking it down. Mrs. Drudge is a very silly character; I think she would be considered "the clown" in this show, and I thought it was very good she is the one who introduces the entire play because this way we can perceive what the style is from the start. Nevertheless, every character has a touch of ridiculousness. My favorite character in the play was Birdboot because when I read the script I didn't notice how funny he was and he really makes a big part of the whole entertainment that the play contains. Magnus, the Irish man on the other hand, not only had an impeccable accent but also showed much confidence handling the wheelchair. These are two big challenges for an actor, and it really did work amazingly.

In general, all the actors on stage had a lot of chemistry, which made all the collective scenes very powerful. For example, when the first inspector comes in and talks to all the people in the house, and also during Mrs. Drudge's monologue, but also during the tea meeting and the card game, this chemistry can be seen, as the events seem all very believable and interesting in its own unnatural way. A very impacting moment, for example, is when the corpse that has been lying under the couch all day (which suspiciously nobody noticed) is brought up in speech by the Inspector. Every character reacts to this, filling the room up with silence. This is when all of them seem guilty and the whole auditorium is filled up with suspense.

In the end, since most of the characters are dead on stage, the director satirized this fact, by literally having all the actors lying dead on stage for the curtain call. This was an engaging ending. This experience was definitely enjoyable. I must say, however, I didn't enjoy reading the script and I wonder if I would have preferred to watch the play without reading it (especially because most of the entertainment is contained in the suspense of the plot). I will leave this for further future reflections, but I wonder what reading the script, and being informed, did for me in this case. I will have to see read the playgoers companion as well to see how that can add to the experience of watching.

Chosen by Kirsten Graham because:

I found Juliana made good points and I definitely agree that this play was the most absurd comedy I have ever seen. I really liked that she took note of the chemistry there was on stage between a lot of the characters. It was something that I had noticed but never really took note of. Juliana describes the play in such a good way I find and she took note of a few things I didn't and that is why I chose her response about seeing the play "The Real Inspector Hound."

Best. Performance. Ever.

by Georgia Priestley-Brown - Tuesday, 1 March 2011, 11:23 PM

When I read the script, I became very frustrated by the constant back and forth between the past and present. I was afraid that I would get annoyed having to watch that happen on stage. But instead, I found the back and forth to be extremely well done. I noticed that the heavy monologues and intense scenes were divided evenly with past and present, and sometimes it was a nice break from a serious moment in the present to have the little girls come onstage and discuss something fun. Also, when I was reading the script, I was powering through it, instead of really taking in all of the dialogue. So when I saw it performed, the scenes were (clearly) longer than I had expected them to be from the read, so the switching back and forth from scene to scene had a very natural and organic flow.

When I read the script, I also found there to be way too many written pauses. Once again, when it was performed, I did not notice any of these pauses. It did not feel like the actors were following a script, taking pauses because the playwright told them to. Instead, their portrayal of the characters seemed natural and organic, coming from a place deep inside of them that blurred the lines between acting and honest experience.

I was pleased to see that the (young) actors did not simply change clothes when they needed to age. I noticed that the intonation in their voices changed, along with their mannerisms and thought processes. The evolution of their characters was most noticeable when Nicole Vair, who played young Patsy, delivered her monologue about her first kiss. She was no longer the young child that she began the show with. Her high pitched, eager and innocent voice was gone, and instead it was replaced with a poignant and wise voice of a young woman.

The performances by every single woman was stunning and breathtakingly haunting, yet none was more beautiful than Old Patsy. Watching her felt like peeking into her everyday life. I did not feel like I was watching an actress portraying a character, she knew her character and her habits inside and out. Not only did she know the character well, but she also knew her "house" so well. She went to every single cupboard knowing what she needed and where she needed to get it. It was a familiarity that not many actors are easily able to translate from rehearsals to the stage. It didn't feel like she was going where the director told her to, it felt as though we were watching her perform her daily routine. It was simplistic and beautiful.

The directorial choices were clear and touching. What I am talking about are the entrances and exits. When Francesca entered Patsy's house for the first time, she crossed over the train tracks and when Marie entered young Patsy's house for the "last" time (while in the green dress) she entered the exact same way. This direction gave me the impression that Marie had passed away when the train hit her; something I was debating when I read the script. When I spoke to the director after the show, she told me she imagined that Patsy had been recording these messages every single day for Marie the day after she passed away. This idea was so well portrayed to the audience, yet it wasn't imposed or forced onto us. Her idea was there, but she left enough room for interpretation so each audience member could formulate their own opinion.

"Perfect Pie" was the greatest performance I have ever seen in Fredericton. Every single actor knew their character inside and out, the set was incredibly designed and the director's choices were clear. The story was beautifully done, and I left in tears. It was "perfect."

Chosen by Juliana Duque because:

First of all, she included extra information in her posting about a talk she had with the director. What an insight! Because we now know the visions of the director and we can wonder/notice other things too. For example, how did she reveal her idea on stage?(the idea that she recorded messages everyday after her friend's death) And Georgia even commented on noticing it, so it clearly added to her experience of watching.

She focused a lot on the acting! Acting is the one of those things about the performance that is impossible to get from reading the script. The fact that she referenced the script, as she knew the lines, but at the same time could acknowledge that the actors managed to put their own presence behind the lines, is amazing! There is no uncertainty that the acting was as good, because sometimes when scripts are so well-written, the actors can get away with a mediocre performance. So this is a big part of the benefits of knowing the script! One can judge the play better. I

wouldn't have thought of this process if I wouldn't have read Georgia's reflection, so I'm going to say it was pretty enlightening.

Fanshen

by Lisa Schellenberg - Saturday, 2 April 2011, 12:44 PM

Watching this play was very interesting. Like most plays when you go to see them the story line makes much more sense and in this case that is very true. Seeing the play performed really clarified my understanding of the story line especially in terms of which character was which. Seeing the people that belonged to the names really helped because I knew who was who.

I liked that the actors weren't the ethnicity or gender that the script implied that they should I really liked that the director made some of the male characters females. It really enforced the idea that it doesn't matter who you are a revolution can happen to anyone, anywhere despite your color or gender. This aspect made the play much more relatable.

I was really impressed with some of the technical aspects of this play. For example that they used a real starting gun rather than a sound effect; I thought that this really enhanced the dramatics of the play. Also I really like the way they displayed the slogan on the board with the projector I'm really happy that they did it this way because it made it really clear to the audience what was happening.

One of the scenes that really sticks out to me is when the two groups are talking on stage (the peasants association and the leaders) and they are having separate discussions but they are happening at the same time. I was really impressed with the accuracy of which the actors froze in place and the other group started. It was really neat. It also reminded me of how political systems work at that even though communism was supposed to be for the people it was really decided by the leaders.

I was a little disappointed with the final scene of the play. I was waiting for all the red banners and stuff to drop but it never happened. I'm not sure why the director choose to leave this stage direction out but I can only assume it was because the theater lacked the means to do it or he didn't feel like it added anything to the end of the play.

When I read the play I really got the sense that there was no main character and after seeing the play that idea is enforced somewhat. When reading the play I was worried that I wouldn't be able to follow the story when I saw it because of the amount of people in the cast. However, there were some characters who moved the story along and characters that I became familiar with. After seeing the play it was clear who the protagonists and antagonists were.

One thing I'm not sure of is the red sashes that some of the characters wore. I assumed that characters who wore the red sashes meant that they had joined the communist party and that the sashes served as visual identifiers for the audience. I'm not sure if I'm reading too much into the red sash but I really thought that that was an interesting idea and helpful for the audience to organize who was who.

When I left the play I felt very somber and serious and I realized I did not laugh once during the play. Not that it is a bad thing. All the other plays I have seen this year have had pieces of humor in them this one did not. It left me feeling much different that all the other plays had and really got me thinking about the world's current situation. I suppose that this is what this genre of play is supposed to do and it was very effective.

I was really impressed that with all the people in the cast that in less than three months the show was put on. I couldn't imagine the amount of work it takes to organize that amount of people in such a short time. At the end when all the cast was on stage I was astounded at how many of them there really were.

This doesn't really have much to do with the play but I thought their program was awesome! It was so well designed and laid out it really captured the essence of the play. I was so impressed with the quality of the program and it supplied some really useful information.

Chosen by Juliana Duque because:

After thinking about what "reading a script in advance" can do for the experience of watching a theatre production, I came across this reflection and thought: knowing the script, allowed Lisa to develop her own opinions about what

she expected from a good production, or a not so good production. It is not always about making the play more entertaining, but maybe, sometimes it is about really knowing what is the quality of the production you are watching, being able to judge it, as opposed to being an ignorant person in the audience just saying " I like it" or "I didnt like it".

Opening Night

by Katie Dow - Thursday, 24 February 2011, 03:15 PM

Heart's Desire Reflection

As much as I enjoyed both productions, it was difficult to remember exactly everything that occurred in each play because they were produced one right after the other. For my own benefit I went directly home and wrote down a few pages of notes in order to help me write my reflections. My first thought after leaving the theatre was that both plays were absolutely hilarious. I actually found myself laughing out loud numerous times. Heart's Desire on stage was, for me, a much different experience than reading the script.

The first thing that surprised me was just how funny I found the play. While reading I did not pick up on the very awkward and strange comments and actions that the characters made, seeing this in the flesh made all the difference. All the characters in the play were extremely well done. My favourite were definitely Alice and Maise. I thought that both actresses very effectively encompassed their characters and developed them in a great way. One thing I didn't notice or think about while watching was the very obvious age gap between the actors and their characters. I think that these two characters showed the least discrepancies in this respect, and they both took on the age very well.

In terms of set there was really very little but I felt that this was the best way to go about it. The simple kitchen setting with the counter and table was sufficed and I thought that the projected graphics of the pots and pans, and kitchen what-not's was appropriate. This play was really all about the words and the actions, not particularly about the set, and those involved captured this well. I also liked the setup and placement of the door. It was neat that it was a 'floating door' and I thought it was an interesting addition to the production. One observation I had was that all of the actors did an absolutely fantastic job with the speed of their lines. I can't imagine how someone would be able to speak their scripted lines with such speed and accuracy. Big kudos to the actors, I can't imagine the practice and patience that would have been involved (this made me wonder if they became annoyed by repeating themselves so many times, I know I would!).

In my notes I made a list of all the things that the stage production made me realize that I did not notice while reading the script. The first thing I mentioned was that I most certainly saw a development of plot in terms of learning and reaching some sort of end. The play in some ways does not 'end' but it has a conclusion which was something I didn't pick up on when reading. I also realized that Maise was a sort of timid and nervous character, I had suspected this in the script but it was much more real to see it. She seemed to sort of play a back-burner role for me while reading but she was definitely one of the main and most important characters on stage. As I mentioned before, the play was funny! There were certain humours and lines that were undoubtedly supposed to be funny and this was much more obvious in visual terms. The play was also largely about domestic and real-world issues. I knew from my reading on Caryl Churchill that the play had some sort of political tone, but I didn't notice until seeing it on stage that the play centralized around the family and the home. The play really verified, for me, that the characters are essentially trying to go back and 'redo' their lives once they reach an undesirable outcome. I think this is supposed to make the audience realize the reality of second chances and do-overs and that they don't really, or always, happen.

The scene where Brian 'eats' himself was very strange. I didn't suspect it to be like that but it was definitely grotesque. I think the point of this part of the play was for the audience to be weirded out and disgusted in order to get an idea of what Brian is really like. Lucas' character did not seem very present or developed and I felt like he was much more important in the script than on the stage. The play could have gone without him and I don't think it would have made much of a difference.

I also don't remember the whole dragon or crucifix scene. I'm guessing these were in the script but for some reason they have slipped my memory. Christianity or religion of some sort was a present theme a few times throughout the play. The stage production really had a lot to do with the idea of death and the end of life which I thought was interesting because I hadn't noticed this before. Interestingly enough the play had very little, if any, happiness but there was still lots to laugh at. I think without this humour the play would have really felt as if it was just dragging on.

Seeing this play in person made everything much clearer. I now feel more in tune with what Churchill is trying to say. The only last comment I have is on the ending. Did it vary from what is in the script? For some reason I was under this impression but that could have been just me and my memory. Whatever the case the play was really well done and I was absolutely impressed by it. I enjoyed watching every minute of it.

Chosen by Jilly Hanson because:

I chose the response Katie had to Heart's Desire. Why I chose it was because that was the one show I didn't read with the class or go see, because I was in it. I thought it was interesting to read what people thought of the show and how they interpreted it differently from what we did for the show. I had read the script, obviously, beforehand and had my own imaginings of what the staging and such would look like. And after reading what people had imagined themselves, I found it hard to picture anything besides what we did. I enjoy how Katie went into detail what she thought of the sets and such. It's interesting to read, from an actor's point of view, just to see what an audience member who has read the script thinks. I also liked how different the characters were from when she read the script. It's just kind of refreshing to read. It's also nice to know that she went home and wrote notes about what she saw. I never would've thought to do that, or made the time to do that. I found that interesting.

Thursday Night

by Kirsten Graham - Friday, 1 April 2011, 11:31 AM

Something I wanted to take note of for going to see the play "Fanshen" is that I really liked how the playgoer's guide included pictures of each of the actor's with their name, their character's name and a background about themselves. It made it easier to explain who was who in this response to seeing the play.

I found watching the play definitely made it a lot easier to follow along with which character was which, even though I still could not remember the names of each of them. I think if I had of read the play closer to watching it, I would have had an easier time remembering names. Even though each character introduced themselves at the beginning of the play, I could not remember their names still.

I expected there to be a lot more guys as the actors of this play, but there were a lot of girls playing men parts. I found this made a big difference in the play because I could not tell which characters were supposed to be guys and which were supposed to be girls since some of the girls were in guy clothing, but had their hair in low ponytails with their hair falling out, or up in a bun. The only girl I found did a good enough job for me to be able to tell she was acting a guy's part was Tui-Chin, played by Rachel Conrod. The reason I knew she was acting a guy part as opposed to the other girls is because she had ALL of her hair tucked in her hat and she tried to talk in a deep voice the whole time. She did a really good job.

I found that Joshua Laplap, who played Yu-lai did a very good job as well. He put a lot of passion and emotion into his character which made it hard to take your eyes off of him whenever he had a line. The other person that I thought did an exceptional job was Xiaoyan Jiang, who played Shen Ching-ho, Old lady Wang and a Peasant. She introduced the play in Chinese which was a pretty cool way to start off "Fanshen", even though I had no idea what she way saying! She, too, got into character really well, talking in a lower voice for the peasant who was a cripple and then talking like she was nervous at points. I just thought her voice was good and she was a good actress.

The play was obviously not set up exactly how I had expected it to be, but it was done in an ideal way. At first I found it strange that when the lights went out for the actor's to move around to their next scene, that there was a blue back light so they could still find their way around, but after a while I liked the idea.

Some of the girls that were soldiers, I could not tell if they were supposed to be girl soldiers or not which made it frustrating. I thought that they all should have at least had their hair up in a tight bun or tucked into a hat. A lot of them just wore low ponytails, one of them even had side bangs hanging out of her hat and a lot of them looked very feminine. It was almost like they cared more about looking good than looking the part. I just wish all the other girls would have followed Rachel Conrod's lead and talked in a deeper voice than normal like her because I wanted to be able to tell who was playing guy parts and who was playing girl parts.

I found all the beating up scenes were fake and not well done on stage. Also at one point, one of the guys that got beaten up and fell to the ground, his butt crack was hanging out to the audience which I thought could definitely have been avoided. It was not pleasant to say the least.

There were a few times during the play that I did not remember the scene whatsoever. I wonder if they had added extra stuff in or did I just completely forget parts?

I had expected myself to enjoy watching the play more than when I had read it but I think I had my hopes too high and honestly found this play very dull to read and watch. It was not the actor's fault because they all did a good job, I just had a hard time paying attention to the play about a quarter of the way through, and it was a two and a half hour play. It was just the fact that it is a play based on history and I am more a fan of comical and hidden meaning plays.

Chosen by Andréa Peters because:

The two following comments in your post caught my attention;

"Some of the girls that were soldiers, I could not tell if they were supposed to be girl soldiers or not which made it

frustrating.”

“I expected there to be a lot more guys as the actors of this play, but there were a lot of girls playing men parts. I found this made a big difference in the play because I could not tell which characters were supposed to be guys and which were supposed to be girls since some of the girls were in guy clothing, but had their hair in low ponytails with their hair falling out, or up in a bun.”

because they made me wonder: “what difference would it have made?” One of the things the script achieved through its use of entirely Asian names, was that to any outsider, the characters were rendered pretty asexual, or unisex. Further, except for Jacob (Tui-Chin), none of the other gender-bending characters were referred to throughout the script with gender assigning pronouns—just their names, on a few occasion. So if it didn’t matter whether the character was male or female in the script, I’m not sure what other understanding being able to tell which character was “supposed” to be a man or a woman on stage would have made...?

After all, it seems like it was a good way to get around male actor shortages the cast might have encountered, and more importantly, it reflected Communism’s attempts at leveling the playing field between men and women, and allowing women to progress and grow just as much as men. Therefore, this post was enlightening because it directly challenged the beliefs I held about having cast women in “mens’ ” roles.

Thursday's Fanshen

by Jilly H - Sunday, 3 April 2011, 05:34 PM

I still don't really know what I thought of the play. I am still having mixed emotions about it..but whatever.

I did enjoy the show. Don't get me wrong. It was really well done. The acting was really strong throughout. There wasn't anyone who was just terrible or tried to upstage any of the other actors. I think my favourite had to be the girl who played Ching-Le or something? I forgot my program under my seat, but the one who was with Yu-Lai and his son in the beginning. I thought she did a really good job at memorizing her lines and saying them so firmly. It was really impressive. Yu-Lai was really good, too. He scared me at times. His laugh was terrifying, but it was perfect. He played that character exactly the way I pictured it in my mind.

I liked the sets. I was worried there wasn't going to be anything and it was going to be up to the audience to picture it all out. And I was not up for that. So, seeing the tower and the little props that were used came in handy. I also really liked how they did the banner thing, with the slides on the board up by the tower. That actually helped a lot with understanding what was happening. How the actors moved, too, helped. If it said 'They Talked for 8 Hours', they would move slightly as if they had been talking for that long. I don't know, but I really enjoyed that.

I didn't like how the stage was set up. My friend and I were sitting in the front row in the middle section and I found it hard to see what was going on sometimes because people had their backs to us a lot. It was kind of annoying to have to try and shift in my seat to see what was happening on stage. I understand that the whole projected stage is an Asian theatre thing, but it just wasn't working from where I was sitting. My friend said to me during one scene "I wish I could see what was happening..." so, it wasn't even just me-- the short one. I also kind of found the seats on the stage a little distracting. There were only a few people up there, but every little movement they made, my attention was drawn to it. And it felt like at some points when the actors were up there, they were conscious of the empty chairs and were trying to steer clear of them. It was just weird. I know that's the director's choice to put chairs up there and stuff, but it wasn't my favourite choice.

One other thing that bothered me was how some of the people made their voices sound different. Yu-Lai's son did that and one of the peasants with a beanie did it, too. I don't know why it bothered me so much, but it did. I could tell it wasn't their voice and it seemed like they were trying to sound more...Asian or something. I don't know if the director told them to do that or not but it didn't seem that necessary. Nobody else was doing it, so it was a little out of place. It wasn't a make or break kind of thing, it was just a little strange to me.

Oh! I really liked the chinese bit they added at the beginning. I didn't know what was being said but I really, really liked it. It put me in the mood for the play. It felt really authentic to me.

Overall, I liked the performance. I didn't LOVE it but I enjoyed it better than reading the play. I could tell characters apart better because I could give them a face. Since I could give them a face, I started remembering what was going to happen and I couldn't do that before seeing the play. After reading the script, it was like it went in one ear and out the other. But, I could keep a steady plotline going when I was watching it. I mean, I'm not a huge fan of it but the cast did a really good job with a confusing script. So, good for them!

Chosen by Andréa Peters because:

"I didn't like how the stage was set up. My friend and I were sitting in the front row in the middle section and I found it hard to see what was going on sometimes because people had their backs to us a lot. It was kind of annoying to have to try and shift in my seat to see what was happening on stage. I understand that the whole projected stage is an Asian theatre thing, but it just wasn't working from where I was sitting. My friend said to me during one scene "I wish I could see what was happening..." so, it wasn't even just me-- the short one. I also kind of found the seats on the stage a little distracting. There were only a few people up there, but every little movement they made, my attention was drawn to it. And it felt like at some points when the actors were up there, they were conscious of the empty chairs and were trying to steer clear of them. It was just weird. I know that's the director's choice to put chairs up there and stuff, but it wasn't my favourite choice."

Further, the reason I found this post interesting is because it addressed the questions I originally entertained as I read the script, and thought about how it is the characters would a) avoid stepping on one another's toes, and b) will other people who have not read the script really be able to keep up with the amount of talking and moving done by the characters when they had their backs to the audience.

In both cases, because I'm finding myself wondering why exactly it is that Len would have chosen to place the little wooden benches where he did, in the corner of the stage all over again... Although I also understand that's part of illustrating the entire village's role in "restoring justice," I'm not sure it was the most effective way to place the people on the stage.

Attending the production Fanshen -> Fanshen
by Lisa Schellenberg - Saturday, 2 April 2011, 12:44 PM

Watching this play was very interesting. Like most plays when you go to see them the story line makes much more sense and in this case that is very true. Seeing the play performed really clarified my understanding of the story line especially in terms of which character was which. Seeing the people that belonged to the names really helped because I knew who was who.

I liked that the actors weren't the ethnicity or gender that the script implied that they should I really liked that the director made some of the male characters females. It really enforced the idea that it doesn't matter who you are a revolution can happen to anyone, anywhere despite your color or gender. This aspect made the play much more relatable.

I was really impressed with some of the technical aspects of this play. For example that they used a real starting gun rather than a sound effect; I thought that this really enhanced the dramatics of the play. Also I really like the way they displayed the slogan on the board with the projector I'm really happy that they did it this way because it made it really clear to the audience what was happening.

One of the scenes that really sticks out to me is when the two groups are talking on stage (the peasants association and the leaders) and they are having separate discussions but they are happening at the same time. I was really impressed with the accuracy of which the actors froze in place and the other group started. It was really neat. It also reminded me of how political systems work at that even though communism was supposed to be for the people it was really decided by the leaders.

I was a little disappointed with the final scene of the play. I was waiting for all the red banners and stuff to drop but it never happened. I'm not sure why the director choose to leave this stage direction out but I can only assume it was because the theater lacked the means to do it or he didn't feel like it added anything to the end of the play.

When I read the play I really got the sense that there was no main character and after seeing the play that idea is enforced somewhat. When reading the play I was worried that I wouldn't be able to follow the story when I saw it because of the amount of people in the cast. However, there were some characters who moved the story along and characters that I became familiar with. After seeing the play it was clear who the protagonists and antagonists were.

One thing I'm not sure of is the red sashes that some of the characters wore. I assumed that characters who wore the red sashes meant that they had joined the communist party and that the sashes served as visual identifiers for the audience. I'm not sure if I'm reading too much into the red sash but I really thought that that was an interesting idea and helpful for the audience to organize who was who.

When I left the play I felt very somber and serious and I realized I did not laugh once during the play. Not that it is a bad thing. All the other plays I have seen this year have had pieces of humor in them this one did not. It left me feeling much different that all the other plays had and really got me thinking about the world's current situation. I suppose that this is what this genre of play is supposed to do and it was very effective.

I was really impressed that with all the people in the cast that in less than three months the show was put on. I couldn't imagine the amount of work it takes to organize that amount of people in such a short time. At the end when all the cast was on stage I was astounded at how many of them there really were.

This doesn't really have much to do with the play but I thought their program was awesome! It was so well designed and laid out it really captured the essence of the play. I was so impressed with the quality of the program and it supplied some really useful information.

Nigel Bone:

The first post I chose to focus on was Lisa Schellenberg's post about seeing *Fanshen*. The reason I chose to write on this post was because I thought she really made some interesting points. The first point of interest in her post was her

discussion on how the play Fanshen seemed to draw attention to the fact that it did not matter what your race, gender, or age: a revolution is something that can affect us all – this is a point that we should all keep in mind. I also like that she drew attention to the inequality within the communistic political system. I also thought it was interesting that she mentioned how at the end of the play the banners failed to fall, because I neglected to pick up on this fact -- but thinking back on it, it might have added to the production if they had included it. The final point that I thought worth mentioning from her post was how she remarked on the potential importance of the red sashes worn by some of the characters. I myself had completely forgotten about them, but now, like Lisa, I find myself wondering about their significance – political or otherwise.

Thursday's Heart's Desire

by Erica Betts - Monday, 28 February 2011, 11:35 PM

Before seeing Heart's Desire, I did not know what to expect. I was curious to see how it was going to be played out and how I would react to certain parts of the play. The actors did an amazing job though and they kept my interest.

When it first started and the girl kept whisking the bowl, I did not know whether to think it was annoying or not. But she kept doing it every time it started over, and every time she did I felt like it was creating more tension between the other two characters when they were talking, you could almost feel the nervousness of her through her whisking. Like you could tell how she was feeling with the other two characters by the way she was whisking and I did not find it annoying at all. I felt like it added to what was going on and it created more tension between the characters.

Another part I noticed was that the big ten foot bird was not in the play and also that the play did not end the same way as the script I read. I was wondering why they chose to do this and how come they did not start over like the script did. Also I found that when watching it, I noticed that there was more randomness than what I remember when I read it. At first I thought that there were some things added in but then I thought about it and thought maybe I just missed some of the things that were in the script. Also I know when I read the script, I skipped through a lot of the repeated things and just read what was new and maybe that is why I missed some of the other little random things within the play.

When it came to the part where he was eating himself, I did not know what to think. First of all, I even forgot about that part and once that scene started being played out, I thought how they did it was very creative. It was also kind of disturbing but very creative nevertheless. I also liked how every time they started over, they went very serious just like what happened, had not happened at all. I liked that aspect of it to because it made me feel like I was erasing what I had just saw and was starting over again.

Another part that I did not realize when reading the play was how much tension was between the father and the daughter. I had no clue when reading it that they were implying that he had raped her or something of that sort. And even when watching it I did not realize that that is what happened till the end when the people I was with started talking about it. I find I still need to keep an open mind when seeing the plays and keep reminding myself that just because you read the script does not mean you actually get the play.

The last thing I would like to talk about is how helpful it was to have people with me that have not seen or read the script. It was funny because every time they would take away more silver wear and stuff that was on the table, my friend would look over at me and be like, oh no, they're stating back further. I also like how she described it as if they never hit her breaking point of how many times they restarted. She said that it was like the people acting knew how far to take the audience and that they knew that she was almost at her breaking point but that they did not cross it. Maybe that is what Caryl Churchill wanted, just to tease the audience and see how far she could take them or see how far the repeating could be done. It was actually quite enjoyable listening to my friend talk about it and how she thought about the whole play. Some of the things she stated, I had not thought of and it opened my eyes to new aspects that the author might have wanted to portray.

Chosen by Elyse Bernais because:

I liked Erica's reflection after seeing Heart's Desire. She did not summarize the play or write anything other than her own personal thoughts after seeing the play. I think she did a good job noting specific details about different characters and included differences she saw within the script and the play. I think that this demonstrated an effective way to understand the play more and try and understand why the director decided to make specific changes. I also think it's interesting how she included peoples reactions to the play, without the same background information that we gather. It shows how much learning about the play really makes a difference.

Thursday Night

by Emily Cochrane - Thursday, 31 March 2011, 11:17 PM

Once again, my comprehension of the play became clear as it was brought to life in front of me. *Fanshen's* story makes sense to me now that I have been a playgoer and not simply a script-reader, and though I found the second half to be quite long (though I was pretty tired), I think the actors all did an excellent job of introducing the audience to hard road to Communism.

In terms of my expectations, I had none concerning the set because the script had specifically said there was no call for one. Imagine my surprise walking into Memorial Hall to see yet another elaborate set, complete with a church tower and a stage that spanned out into the auditorium. I was not unimpressed by this at all, but I cannot help but wonder what my experience would have been had the set been nothing more than a blank backdrop. Nevertheless, the set caught my eye once again when I noticed actors coming onstage not just from backstage but from the door where I had entered the auditorium and onto the stage that way. I thought this was a good decision on the part of the director because it changed my experience of seeing *Fanshen* in the sense that there was a difference between it and other plays with "conventional" entrances.

As I watched *Fanshen*, I often felt that certain scenes had been added because I had absolutely no recollection of reading them. This may have been in part that I read the script during March Break, almost a month ago, but I do not think these scenes should have come as that much of a surprise to me. I am also wondering if, because I was actually *seeing* the action instead of reading and trying to imagine the action, that that would have caused my slight amnesia. This was different than when I saw *Buried Child* as I knew there were two (or more, apparently) different versions of the script, so I kind of knew when something different was happening compared to what I had read. I am left wondering if there has been more than one script of *Fanshen* to accommodate my new perspectives on scenes.

I guess the main thing I noticed, aside from the set and entrances, what... well, it was how Caucasian the entire cast was. Obviously I expected this but I did not feel that the costumes did much for convincing me that I was watching a play about China, except for the pointed hats and the Communist Work Force members. I feel like more could have been done on the part of the actors to show that they were portraying Chinese people, though I guess if they had put on fake accents, they could have risked offending someone unintentionally. It makes sense why they did not use accents then. Still, I feel like something was taken away and that I was just watching some actors who were just simply acting instead of bringing the characters to life. I guess what I am trying to say is that I was not necessarily as spell-bound by the characters this time around.

Fanshen is an excellent play, however, because it tackles some great themes and concepts. In one act, we saw a collapsed power structure and the onset of a new ideology and the struggles faced in light of both of these. Out of all of the other plays I have read and seen – *Buried Child*, *Perfect Pie*, and *Inspector Hound* – *Fanshen* was without a doubt the most intellectually stimulating.

Chosen by Elyse Bernais because:

I enjoyed reading Emily's reflection about *Fanshen* because not only do I share a lot of the same ideas that she discusses, but she touched base on many different aspects of the play. Emily discussed the elaborate set and why it effected her. She also discussed what she thought would've added to the play and what the costume designer could've done to make the characters were convincing. I also like how she compared this play to the other plays that she had read and seen, and how she picked out certain themes that she found important. This demonstrates her understanding of the play, and continues to add to it as well.

Hilarious Hound?

by Georgia Priestley-Brown - Wednesday, 2 March 2011, 11:13 AM

I tend to dislike it until I see the production. What I mean, is that for every script I have read in class, I've found it to be dry and slightly hard to get through. This is mainly because I do not want to have any ideas about how I would perform or would like to see the stage set up until I see the actual production. Therefore for every play so far I've been extremely surprised by the productions and very impressed with the actors and the shows as a whole. This, however, was not the case with "Inspector Hound."

As a whole, I found the show to be lacking a lot of energy. Many (though not all) of the actors seemed as though they were doing and saying things because the script and the director told them to. The play inside the play was supposed to be outrageous and over the top, and instead I found it to be dull and slow. Their gestures were not big, and neither were their voices. It seemed as though they were trying to play it straight, which is not how I thought it was intended to be performed. I also noticed that a few of the main characters had very little facial expressions. With Whitney, who played the maid, she had incredibly large and expressive eyes on stage; the entire time she was cleaning (while BirdBoot and Moon were talking in the audience) I watched her move around the stage and dust off everything, down to the cookies. She was over the top and it was exactly how it should have been done. This was not the case with other actors. For example, Roddy, who played Inspector Hound, seemed as though he was just reciting the lines. He didn't seem connected to the character he was playing.

I also found it hard to hear Birdboot and Moon in the audience. It seemed to me as though the microphones hindered more than they helped. Unless the actors were speaking directly into the microphones, I couldn't hear too much of what they were saying. I wish they had ditched the mics and chosen to project more with their own voices. I found that Jeremy, who played Moon, relied a bit too much on his microphone, and tended to whisper. This caused an awful scratchy feedback into the mic and made his speech sound slurred.

I also noticed that it was hard to hear the actor in the wheel chair. His mouth was almost totally covered with a big beard, and he was using an Irish accent, which made half of his words sound chewed up. This is not to say that I did not enjoy his performance. I thought he was funny and energetic, and really enjoyed his entrances and exits in the wheelchair, as well as his mechanical laughter. He was exactly as I had imaged the character, big and over the top.

I also really enjoyed Birdboot, played by Jake Martin. He managed to make the position in the audience, a normally awkward thing to watch, very enjoyable and entertaining. I had thought that having both characters directly in the audience would take me out of the scene of the play, but instead he managed to overcome the limitations of not being on the actual stage, and made his character compelling. When he finally joined the other actors on stage, his performance was fun and energetic, exactly what the rest of the cast should have been. He outshined many of the actors by having a loud and exuberant personality, and yet he was only a critic. He became so wrapped up in the atmosphere of the outrageous, that he himself became a character. I had only wished that the other actors were able to meet his energy.

Chosen by Erica Betts because:

Georgia's post I really felt useful because she came out bluntly and said how she felt about it. She did not beat around the bush and she was very honest. I also found her reflection helpful because I agreed with many things she had to say. It was a reflection that I could relate to and I was glad to find out that I was not the only one who felt this way. And, of course, she has shown me aspects that I had never thought of before. One thing being is that she talked about the microphones being in the way of the two actors in the audience. When I went to see it, I could not hear them very well either and when she mentioned about the microphones, I realized that they could have been the reason why I could not hear.

Saturday Night

by Alexander Brown - Sunday, 27 February 2011, 12:43 AM

Reflection on seeing *Hearts Desire*

Not to start on a negative note, but I didn't overly enjoy this play. It was the strangest thing too; I had read the script and thought it was brilliant, but when I saw it on Saturday night I was kind of disappointed. Starting out it seemed fine, the characters seemed portrayed younger than the script says, but I got over that. I tried so hard to like this performance, but in the end - right down to the end as a matter of fact - I really didn't like it.

This play was not at all what I imagined from when I read the script. I imagined the characters less animated, more relaxed. It was quieter, and less funny. I took it the script maybe a little too analytical, but something about old people saying these lines seemed less energetic, and more serious. I liked that there was comedy on stage; it just seemed at points that it was over done, lines that I read and had emotional and serious meaning were overrun with laughter from the audience. I pictured Brian older, and less mean; even though it is clear from the script that he and Alice were on bad terms most of the time, he never came across as mean and hateful. I especially hated the deliverance of the lines "you are my heart's desire". It was the creepiest thing and again I didn't see that in the script; watching this play made me feel like I missed a huge meaning of the play. It's all up to interpretation, but this one was so far from mine that I almost thought I had the wrong idea all along.

What I did enjoy about the play was the "re-wind" effect on stage; it was done well and it gave a comedy to the play that the script did not. It was more or less what I imagined while reading the play and the actors performed it well. The direction of this play was going towards situational comedy in the sense that the play was only funny because of what was taking place after the "re-wind". I don't think it's the direction I would have gone with, this play seemed like a chance to showcase a unique form of storytelling; in my opinion making it a comedy makes the play lose the special effect that Churchill wrote into it. This was supposed to be an interesting experience and instead felt like a farce. I would like to point out at this point that at no time did I find the acting bad; all of the actors did great with the direction they were given, I just wasn't a fan of the outcome.

Something that didn't quite seem right about this play was the scene where Brian eats himself; it was somewhat disturbing and about half way through it became boring. I remember this scene in the script, but never imagined the scene on stage like that. Again this felt to me like a point where Brian gets to express himself with a meaningful monologue, but it was played down as just weird by having him eat himself and then both the women shriek at the end. I also felt like I didn't quite understand the relationship between Brian and Susy, besides the fact that he is her father and she is his daughter; there was this underlying tone during the performance that Brian had sexually molested Susy at some point. I got that feeling when she arrived home and he delivered the lines "you are my heart's desire", at that point I had this really bad feeling about letting Brian near her. I didn't get this tone at all when reading the script; I picked up on the obviously fractured relationship the two had from what was written, but this creepy molestation tone never once crossed my mind.

What I found interesting about this performance was what it was extremely different from what I had read. Direction is everything in a play, and the direction of this play was so far from the play I had read that I almost thought it was a different play. It's interesting how we interpret things like scripts; we have this preconceived notion that we know what the play is all about when we have read it, but then it's presented in front of you and all of your preconceptions are blown away. You have been taken to a world that you didn't know existed and it can be scary; diving into the unknown is frightening, especially when you were so sure you knew what was coming. *Heart's Desire* was an experience I will never forget, but hey you can't always enjoy everything you do, and I'm glad I finally went to a play that I didn't love; I was starting to feel repetitive.

Chosen by Ashley MacDonald because:

I like how Alexander organized his writeup for seeing *Hearts Desire*. The layout makes it easy to read since it was split into different paragraphs that say at the beginning where he is going with the paragraph. For example, the paragraphs begin with "What I did enjoy about the play was..." or "Something that didn't quite seem right about this play was...". I found this very helpful, because its easy to go all over the place in these writeups when you are sitting down and writing from the top of your head, in a non-formal way. I think im going to use this method next time I do a review on seeing a play.

