



CANTERBURY FESTIVAL

YOUNG CRITICS 2015

Review of It's A Wonderful Life

Marlowe Theatre, 7.30pm 22 October 2015

Written by Hannah Parry

Over the years, Frank Capra's 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life* has become regarded as something of a Christmas classic. It tells the story of George Bailey, a businessman, family man and all round good-egg, whose hopes and dreams to travel the world, whilst at the same time improve the lives of his fellow townsfolk, appear to lay in ruins as he stands on a bridge on Christmas Eve, convinced that the world would be a better place without him. It falls upon Clarence, a hapless, bumbling, but nonetheless likeable angel-in-training, to come down to Earth and try to persuade him otherwise.

But how well does the full-length film, with a cast of dozens and a variety of outdoor locations, transfer onto a theatre stage? The answer, as witnessed by a disappointingly small, but appreciative, audience at the Marlowe Theatre on Thursday night, is very well indeed. Adapted by playwright Tony Palermo, the stage version ingeniously takes the form of a vintage radio play, staged in front of a live audience, and set in 1949. All of the characters are played by just six actors, plus the assistant stage manager providing live sound effects from the side of the stage.

Clever use of lighting and background music was very effective in conveying a change of scenery, whilst the excellent cast played their multiple roles superbly; a pair of glasses, a slight change of accent, or maybe a hat indicating a different character. David Benson, as Mr Gower, Mr Potter, George's father and Bert the Policeman, also took on the role of compere, introducing proceedings and engaging the audience in an impeccable 1940s cut-glass accent.

In a brilliant comic touch, the cast also voiced various "messages from our sponsors" during commercial breaks. These included ads for various cleaning products to brighten every housewife's day, and also Capstan Full-Strength cigarettes, "the healthy brand, as smoked by doctors". How times have changed.

So all in all a very enjoyable performance, from an entertaining and talented cast, who surely deserved a far larger audience.