

Critic review of Prisoner 46664: Nelson Mandela

This play, performed Monday 4th February at the theater 'L'Intégral' in Belley, was a good opportunity for the local high school pupils to discover drama in English. The play written by Sam Pinnell, directed by Lucille O'Flanagan and starring Heza Botto as Nelson Mandela, Beni Bliss as Walter Sisulu, Chengetai as Winnie, shows the action of Nelson Mandela as an activist who wanted to change South Africa's apartheid laws , but who changed the whole world...



in 1994.

The play powerfully unfolds all aspects of Mandela's life like his childhood, his meeting with his new companion and best friend, Walter Sisulu, his fight as an activist within the ANC, his private life with Winnie Mandela, his 27 years of imprisonment... Of course, the play focuses on key moments of the struggle for equal rights and freedom during apartheid from its beginning in 1948 to the evolution of the ANC that takes more violent initiatives, the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 until the election of Nelson Mandela as president of South Africa

As for the directing of the play, there are only five actors playing 28 roles and this shows their skills both as comedians and as singers too. Indeed, throughout the play, we can hear songs written by Elisa Le Cam and sung by the multi-talented actors.

The cast is very good, Heza Botto as Nelson Mandela is convincing and very moving, Beni Bliss is friendly and loyal as Walter Sisulu. We feel sympathy for them, especially when they are in prison. Chengetai as Winnie Mandela is magnificent and brave, she deserves an award for her acting and singing skills.

There are also symbolical moments, when Mandela and De Klerk broke the sign board on the bench forbidden to black people. The audience could easily follow Mandela's story entangled with the story of the fight against inequality in South Africa also thanks to a screen projecting a calendar of the passing years.

The props and settings moved by the actors themselves are very basic but effective, for example, a white outline represents Mandela's prison cell. The play is highly educational and informative but it succeeds in being both funny and deeply touching.

To conclude, with a tiny budget, a story based on Mandela's commitment, skilled actors, and minimalist settings and props, the company "Théâtre en Anglais" managed to convey the aspects of the struggle against apartheid and the captivating story of the historical figure of prisoner 46664.

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