

# Cheshire Cats

## Date

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2019

## Company

The Tamaritans Theatre Company

## Venue

The Red House, Plymouth School of Creative Arts

## Type of Production

Play

## Director

Steve Baker

## Musical Director

n/a

## Choreographer

n/a

## Report

Although I had heard of this play before I had not seen it before, although I had been able to glean some information on the topic beforehand. The play features a team of ladies who have signed up to do the Cancer Moonwalk in London. The story is very cleverly written by Gail Young following her own experience of taking part in the event and, subsequently, being diagnosed with cancer. It was clearly a very personal piece of writing.

This production was full of brilliantly funny dialogue and the five principal ladies (with one man) delivered their lines with terrific characterisation. Suzanne MacPherson played Hilary, the self-appointed Team Leader, who drives the ladies to exceed their expectations even when they don't want to be driven. A classic performance of drive and ambition, over-riding compassion and thought, beautifully portrayed with just enough remorse at the right moments. Catherine

Teague played Siobhan, Hilary's friend, with her usual ease and polished characterisation throughout: always supportive, even when she didn't really agree with Hilary, but finally putting her foot down to make Hilary behave with more empathy, with Chelsea Woolard playing Yvonne for every spot of comedy in the dialogue and her facial expressions just added to the enjoyment. A thoroughly enjoyable performance which particularly resonated with me! Claire Hooper played newcomer to the team, Maggie, a nicely characterised performance of which more later. Rona Perry was terrific as divorcee Vicky, finding a new man and bringing him along to take the place of a missing team member. Karl Davis was that boyfriend, a very carefully observed performance which was fun to watch.

This group of principals were very well supported by other members of the company in smaller, but no less important roles. I don't have the space to mention them all individually, but the characters were *all* well thought out and confidently performed. As with all productions, this was a team effort and the clear camaraderie of the company was a pleasure to observe.

Director Steve Baker made this production a complete success, extracting both the comedy and the sadness in the script. Each principal character had a monologue at some point in the play, which gave an interesting insight into their characters, but the absolute star monologue was Claire Hooper's as Maggie. Her closing speech was from the heart and had me and, I suspect, much of the audience close to tears.

The set was cleverly designed and constructed – the kind of scenery I like in my own productions in fact! Versatile pieces on wheels which turned and moved to create effective slick scene changes throughout. The staging worked very well and made our focus the characters, which is how it should be.

The play has a similar resonance to 'Calendar Girls', and I hope that other companies choose to do it, not only because it is a terrific platform for strong female performers but also because the rights for the play raise funds for Cancer awareness and research. My congratulations to The Tamaritans - well done for a brilliant production.

**Gareth Davies**

**NODA South West District 3**

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