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MARIA TZAVARAS | Nov 04, 2010 - 8:22 AM |  0

East Side Players stages 'The Woman in Black'

Classic ghost story told using a basic set, a few chairs

When a tragedy so devastating befalls a human being, not even death is an escape from that pain. Last Thursday, the East Side Players staged *The Woman in Black*, a story about how one woman's pain transcended her death and how two men suffered the consequences of the curse she left behind. This is a show that perfectly fits the season with its theme of ghosts and ghouls.

Adapted by Stephen Mallatrat from the book by Susan Hill, this classic ghost story was told using a basic set of a few chairs and crates, clever lighting techniques and a cast of two, the actor (Christopher Irving) and Arthur Kipps (Daryn DeWalt).

The show is set in a small theatre in England, where Mr. Kipps has come to seek the help of an actor who he hopes will teach him how to tell his story to his family. Mr. Kipps had a devastating experience that haunts him, but as he's not a performer, his delivery needs work.

Mr. Kipps' story is told through a series of flashbacks where the actor, in trying to teach Mr. Kipps, becomes him, and Mr. Kipps ends up playing the many people he encountered along the way in this haunted tale.

Suddenly, the audience is transported back decades to when it all began, to the moment when Mr. Kipps, then a solicitor, is asked by his boss to travel to a remote town to attend the funeral of a client, recluse Alice Drablow, and wrap up her business affairs.

However, from the moment Mr. Kipps arrives, he knows something isn't right and can see the fear in the eyes of the residents of this small town. It doesn't take long before he begins to see strange things, including the figure of a woman in black, which propels him to begin unravelling the mystery surrounding Mrs. Drablow's life and death.

Mr. Kipps' business trip has slowly turned into a quest for the truth, but as a result, he ends up suffering some terrifying things and consequences that change his life forever. And although the story happened years ago, the actor soon finds he, too, is not immune to the danger.

This show featured the superb talents of DeWalt and Irving, who carried this show entirely by themselves and tackled the task of keeping the audience captivated the entire time.

Irving transitions smoothly from the actor to Mr. Kipps, playing both with the right amount of intensity and empathy. DeWalt impressively played more than five characters, each with their own mannerisms and personality. It was amazing to watch.

This show had the right combination of creepy, mysterious and intriguing, and the basic set and props actually gave it a more authentic feel, rather than a hokey ghost story feel. However, the minimalist set meant the audience had to visualize many of the places and situations Mr. Kipps encountered during his ordeal.

Also, because this is a story-telling-based play, there was a lot of dialogue making it slow moving at times, and it required a lot of imagination and was quite long, making it definitely not a show for everyone's tastes.

But if you enjoy being spooked and delving into a mystery that has many surprising twists and revelations, this show is for you.

The Woman in Black runs until Saturday, Nov. 13, 8 p.m., at the Papermill Theatre, 67 Pottery Rd. Tickets are \$20 and \$15 for students. For tickets, call 416-425-0917.

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