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Convictions: The Archbishop and the Antichrist – Soho Theatre, London

Director: Lucy Kerbel

Writer: Michael Ashton

Reviewer: Toni Stott-Rates

The Public Reviews Rating: ★★★★★

“I cannot forgive unless I know the truth” – Charity Kondile

Set during the TRC hearings in post-Apartheid South Africa, we are witness to a fictionalised story of Archbishop Desmond Tutu balancing his personal beliefs and relationships with the strains and pressures of presiding over various hearings of the TRC, and his visits to prison to meet with mass-murderer Piet Blomfeld.

The Synergy theatre project aims to bring issues surrounding imprisonment and its effects on those inside and those out into the public arena, as well as working with prisoners and ex-prisoners to help towards rehabilitation and resettlement. Ashton, as one of their writers, has brought into the arena the story of the post-apartheid struggle of a nation learning how to forgive and yet manages to boil it down to the very personal level, of one broken man’s tortured struggle to find in himself something he can say is not a monster, to be able to apologise and ask for forgiveness, and another mans struggle to give it.

This play is well balanced and wrenching, Ashton and indeed the director Lucy Kerbel manage to keep the tension going at all times but bring in enough laughter and light to not make for an overly dour production.

All the actors are committed and eminently watchable, Oscar Pearce delivers a murderer in Piet Blomfeld, who’s hard shell of hatred and anger slowly gets whittled away and when the breakdown comes it is fascinating and cathartic. Jeffrey Kissoon’s Desmond Tutu, is a benign icon made human, fallible and vulnerable and all the more admirable because of it.

The only downside to this play, is the heat, I melted, Soho theatre provided jugs and glasses of water during interval, but I have to say they need some sort of air-conditioning in there, I could see the actors losing weight on stage they were sweating so much and just about every third person in the audience was using their programmes or something as a fan.

“History if anything will remember what we have done” – Desmond Tutu

Go see this play, Michael Ashton has created a piece of theatre that questions our very present struggles to understand truth and forgiveness, whether with each other or with prisoners in the criminal system, but he also keeps South Africa's history from being forgotten, the stories uncovered, the lessons learnt, the truths of a nation of white men whose fear of, and struggle for control over black men lead to oppression of the most inhumane kind.

Runs until: 21 May 2011