

UNDER MILK WOOD

REDChilli Theatre Company

Bakehouse Theatre

Until April 16

Review by Nikki Gaertner

Described as “a play for voices”, Dylan Thomas’ “Under Milk Wood” was written as a radio play that takes listeners into the lives, dreams and interactions of the inhabitants of a Welsh seaside village throughout the course of one day. A total of 53 characters are presented and explored throughout the duration of the show.

Setting this show in a theatre presents a significant challenge, as the audience can now both see and hear the actors as they move between scenes and characters. Unfortunately this challenge was not met well by REDChilli and director Geoff Brittain.

The cast of twelve changed costume props in full light as they assumed new characters, and were mostly seated very close to one another, distracting from those that should hold the focus of the scene. In addition, the sound effects technician (Sally Fox) was deliberately placed in a highly visible area, and while she was very talented with providing the appropriate sounds and never missed a cue, watching her became another distraction from the actors playing out a given scene.

Each cast member was in clear possession of their script throughout the duration of the show, and though the play was set for radio, this is really inexcusable in a theatre setting. Watching the cast read along instead of holding character is not entertainment, and after a lengthy rehearsal period it is expected that at least small paragraphs and songs should be memorised.

There were some standout performances from the cast however; including Bill Ramsay, who remained in character throughout the show and never distracted from scenes he wasn’t involved in. Lindy LeCornu also provided some nice personalities, Kim Clark easily and enthusiastically interchanged between characters, and Deborah Walsh presented some pleasant moments with her sweet singing voice.

Sadly, Peter Davies, in his important role of the narrator, started in full character, but tended to revert to simply reading out his statements with his eyes becoming his script by the close of the show. Multiple actors, including Davies, also need to watch their accents, as sometimes they made their words difficult to understand.

All in all, Under Milk Wood certainly has the potential to be a memorable, impressive and haunting show, but major changes would need to be made for this to be “a different theatre in both content and standard from the usual amateur fare in South Australia” - REDchilli’s aim, as stated in the program.