

Review: Frankenstein at Wilton's Music Hall

WILTON'S MUSIC HALL ♦ 8 - 17 MARCH 2017

A child-like and vulnerable creature: B. L. Sherrington reviews Tristan Bernay's adaptation of Frankenstein.

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Frankenstein at Wilton's Music Hall. Photo: Philip Tull.

What makes a monster? Is it a larger-than-life stature and grotesque features, or a loneliness that becomes unacceptable, making you hate the world? According to Tristan Bernays, the adaptor of *Frankenstein*, “Anyone is capable of becoming a monster – all it takes is a lack of love.” He goes on in the programme notes to describe his fondness of monsters. “They remind us of what it means to be human. Not just because their hideous shapes make us reflect on our own, but because they can often demonstrate far more humanity than us actual humans.” These same thoughts permeate through his version of Mary Shelley’s masterpiece.

Wilton Music Hall is in many ways the perfect setting for *Frankenstein*. The décor matches that of his laboratory with ripped, almost decaying, walls and crumbling banisters fit for a Tim Burton production.

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Under Eleanor Rhode’s direction, *Frankenstein* is performed by George Fletcher, whilst the role of The Creature is shared by Fletcher with Rowena Lennon. Fletcher’s portrayal of both characters is a risk, but one that works out. As The Creature, he is horrified by his appearance. He is scared, abused,

and attacked by those he comes in contact with as he experiences everything for the first time. Speaking in a high pitched and innocent voice – his first word is ‘yuck’ – he is very much like an infant child. He curiously touches the glowing light bulb, unaware of its dangers and is in obvious pain as he comes to life like a newborn baby screaming during its delivery. He craves the love of a parent, particularly when he is beaten by the children of an elderly blind man, asking “Am I never to feel a friendly touch?”

In contrast, as *Frankenstein* Fletcher is cold and aggressive, insisting “I made you and I can unmake you. You are nothing.” *Frankenstein* as the creator of the Creature is, in many ways, an absentee father, even taking

offence when the Creature calls him by name. His regret of bringing The Creature to life is transparent. He has no love for him and does not trust him. Not even an ounce of empathy demonstrated. His concern is only for his bride. While The Creature is childlike he is smart in the way he uses Frankenstein's love for his partner to benefit himself. When Frankenstein and The Creature come to blows, it is an emotional fight. Possibly more than intended.

The strongest moments of the The Watermill Theatre's production is The Creature's interaction with the audience, particularly in the moment where he is searching for a name of his own. Equally, David Gregory's sound design powerfully evokes The Creature's world. Thoughts of Frankenstein are first played by a tape recorder before we hear the sounds of the Creature coming to life, bones eerily cracking and what can only be assumed to be electrocution. In more optimistic moments the birds sing and the music offers The Creature excitement and child-like delight. However, his happiness is almost manic. Despite his size and appearance, he is also like a child in having no way of controlling his emotions.

The Creature has endured a life of pain, yet he demonstrates more humanity than many 'attractive' people demonstrate. When Frankenstein betrays him, he does not harm Elizabeth, despite being labelled a monster. What we are left with is a reminder that Frankenstein is at heart a story about the need for comfort.

*Frankenstein is playing at Wilton's Music Hall until 18th March 2017.
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