

The rise of Nazism brought vividly to life

SHOW: Mephisto

DIRECTOR: Christopher Weare

CAST: Scott Sparrow, Adrian Collins, Julia Anastasopoulos, Andrew Laubscher, Kate Liquorish, Wilhelm van der Walt, Luke Ellenbogen, Isabel Martens, Mark Elderkin, Roxanne Blaise, Emily Child, Louis Viljoe, Tinarie van Wyk Loots, Deborah Vierya, Guy De Lancey, Carel Nel, Nicholas Ellenbogen, Mikkie-Dene Le Roux and Mbulelo Grootboom

VENUE: The Arena Theatre at UCT's Hiddingh Campus on Orange Street, Cape Town until July 24

REVIEW: Peter Tromp



Tinarie van Wyk Loots and Emily Child in 'Mephisto'

"What happened here, can happen again at any time, and anywhere." These words echo at the end of the BBC documentary 'The Nazis: A Warning from History.' I think in some way, most intelligent and educated (I use those terms advisedly) people have a fear deep down inside of them that those words can truly be realised again at any moment, that the lunatics can get the run of the asylum, so to speak, just like they did in Germany some 80 years ago, and 'Mephisto' brings that anxiety vividly home. The play is so fully realised that the thick layers of menacing portent encoded in the text fill the theatre like some kind of rancid vapour.

You simply don't feel the same afterwards as you did when you walked into the theatre before the show started. The whole affair is likely to make one question the very foundation of our mostly cushy reality.

Despite the challenges the production throws at one, or perhaps because of them, 'Mephisto' is breathlessly entertaining. Riveting from start to finish, this surely has to be the best work that The Mechanicals repertory theatre group has done so far, and that is saying something, as this group of ever-expanding thespians has lit up the theatre world with their passion and enthusiasm for the material they have staged in the last couple of years. It has been a singularly pleasurable experience basking in their gusto and talent during that time.

In the crudest terms, 'Mephisto' concerns itself with the machinations of a group of actors, writers and directors in a German provincial theatre during the lead up to that country's embrace of fascism. One actor in particular, namely Hendrik Höfgen (the excellent Adrian Collins) captures our attention.

A reactionary blowhard by nature, Höfgen's initial revulsion of fascism transforms itself into an embrace of Hitler's brutal dogma as his careerism becomes apparent to the rest of the artists he essentially betrays.

What's most impressive about 'Mephisto' as a play is that although it is tied thoroughly to its milieu, it is utterly modern and applicable to today in the way it emphasises the extent to which the personal element can inform political thought, and the way that subjectivism can often have disastrous consequences.

I have vague remembrances as a 17 year old of watching the movie version after taking it out at the local library, but nothing about that movie touched me as much as the wholehearted conviction and application of the entire cast here. They are working with a director in Chris Weare who is absolutely at the top of his game and the result is an enthralling, expertly paced work that although almost three hours long, doesn't feel it.

If you haven't yet experienced the full force of The Mechanicals, now is the perfect opportunity to do so. They have once again given us their absolute best, and I hope Cape Town responds in kind by returning the love, in their droves. Let's just say that this is the perfect tonic for the post World Cup blues.

* Book for all shows on 021 480 7129. For more information, visit

www.themechanicals.co.za