

Wicked Wicked Fun

Wicked, Wicked Waxworks
Phoenix Theatre
October 27-November 5

review by Chris Helmers

Wicked, Wicked Waxworks, a hit of the '88 Fringe Festival, is a play written, directed and presented with fun in mind and I guarantee that you will have lots of fun watching it. The primary focus of fun is the wicked, wicked Baba Valava Baba Yoga (she says that so darn fast) played by Linda Karenko.

The play opens with Baba talking to the audience about her troubles and plans. She has been the housekeeper and, because young Lord Dandy doesn't have the ability nor the inclination, manager in absentia of Dandy Manor. She had thought that Dandy would fall in love with her and marry her, making her the Lady of the manor as she deserves, but he is only interested in monsters. He has no thought of nor concern for women. Ahhh, but she has a wicked, wicked plan. Being a self proclaimed witch, she has planted a love-potoin-impregnated apple in a basket of apples so that, when Dandy takes a bite, he will fall helplessly in love with the first person he sees (whom of course will be her because Dandy never leaves the manor). He will marry her and she will then be the rightful lady over the manor.

Of course, her plans are foiled. Dandy has hired a famous sculptor, Thomas Bain-Rhot (Gary Lloyd), and a troupe of actors and actresses to... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Dandy has always been wealthy and pampered, never having any need to fear for anything. This troubles him. He hungers for the knowledge of fear that escapes him. Ahhh, but he has a plan. If he cannot experience fear himself, he will hire actors to portray fear then capture that expression of fear in wax sculptures. His new found employees come on that fateful, dark night and, along with the wiles of love (both true and magic induced) plans are thwarted, resolves foiled, issues confused and a whole new raison d'etre is created for all involved.

The first act of WWW is packed with Karenko's flawless and impeccable rendition of Baba. You find yourself waiting anxiously for her return to stage whenever she is absent. It becomes difficult to maintain interest in what the other characters are up to. Consequently, the second act, wherein Baba appears for only a short time, is relatively boring. Even Karenko's second act character, Barbara, pales in the light of Baba. There is a savior in the second act being one Tommy Rhot (again, Gary Lloyd), the geek security guard grandson of Thomas Bain-Rhot. Lloyd, who not only plays two characters but is also the co-originator, the music and sound effects, and the special "monstrous effects" of WWW, plays out our comic view of a stereotypical nerd extremely well.

Too much cannot be said for Karenko's treatment of Baba. Baba could so easily have been over-acted, but Karenko brings perfection to the timing, the accent, and the dynamics of this clairvoyant, black-lipped, cackling witch/housekeeper. I'm doubtful that anyone could play this part so successfully.

So, for a more than delightful part of your All Hallows Eve festivities, take in *Wicked, Wicked Waxworks*... and why not wear a costume?



Ron Sears

Macabre runs amok in Phoenix Theatre's production of *Wicked, Wicked Waxworks*.

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