



It would be a sin to miss

Warm, funny and brilliantly performed, *Preacherosity* is a delightfully fresh take on issues of life and faith.

Set in the heart of Texas, in the town of Bubbling Springs, its characters are part of a small Baptist community in a desperate search to find a new preacher.

The arrival of a mysterious stranger ("J" Paladin Dickerson) throws their lives into chaos, as his unconventional message causes their masquerades and illusions to unravel.

Comedy is at its funniest when it hits nearest to the bone, and this play resounds with truth. Directed by Omar F Okai, the timing is impeccable. The pace and rhythm, although predictable at times, is seamless in its movement between explosive action and moments of intimacy and vulnerability.

The action centres around the church meeting-room where the local Search Committee convenes. Simply designed, with the main focus on three large panels of stained glass windows depicting preachers in various attitudes, the effect is of a small-town church steeped in tradition.

It is here, in the conflict and clashes of personality, that the true comic genius of the play comes to life. Larry Herold's script is bold, witty and poignant. Cushioned with a generous dose of humour, it takes the characters of Bubbling Springs through a journey of collision, tension and deep soul-searching.

A host of issues are raised: faith, conscience, what constitutes a meaningful Sunday sermon, whether an old flame amongst certain committee members could reignite, or whether ditzy Angela could truly make it as a "Halfway To Heaven" beauty consultant.

Although excellently written and directed, the triumph of the play is in the performances given by the cast. Both the rough-and-ready, tell-it-like-it-is Morris (Glenn Wrage) and the feisty Mary Magdalene-type Vicky (Basienska Blake) are vividly and honestly portrayed. Morris's ability to cut right to the point provides the true grit of the narrative, while his irrepressible wit serves both to dissolve the tension and spur on the action.

Gina Rowland gives a textbook performance as an uptight, controlling businesswoman, and Julie Rogers sparkles as the ditzy young aspirant, Angela. Roger Gordon is a compelling and charismatic mysterious stranger, and Michael Fitzpatrick shows insight in his portrayal of the wearied chairman, Elliot.

The depth and honesty of the performances, helped by the intimate space of the Jermyn Theatre, allowed the audience to be completely drawn into the story.

The fresh, fearless approach to issues of faith and religion combined with the warmth and depth of the acting make this play an absolute gem. Profound and wickedly astute in its perceptions of hypocrisy and the hilarity of human folly, Preacherosity is cutting-edge theatre at its best.

- Preacherosity, Jermyn Street Theatre, SW1, until May 6. Box Office 020 7287 2875

1:13pm Tuesday 18th April 2006

By Shirley Hobson

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