

Review: Girl From The North Country

By Dulcie Harrison

***Girl From The North Country* at Theatre Royal Plymouth**

A musical written by Conor McPhearson is brought to Plymouth by our wonderful Theatre Royal and will have you tapping and humming to the familiar songs of Bob Dylan all evening...and possibly all week!

But firstly, I urge you to see the performance that the cast did in the city centre on opening day. What a treat for the people of Plymouth to see a flash mob style performance in the middle of the day. Footage can be seen on the Theatre Royal Plymouth and *Girl From The North Country* social media pages.

Set in 1934 in the heartland of America, *Girl From The North Country* centres on a run-down guesthouse where we meet the occupants- a collection of lost souls all looking to escape from their pasts and find a better future while surviving a complicated present. Standing at a turning point in their lives, we see a well-crafted masterpiece of all different interwoven stories of the separate stories all living under one wild and struggling roof.

The stage is set with soft brown hues, very few props apart from a couple chairs, a central table, and suspended backdrops, yet I feel this simplicity allowed for the cast to fill the space and allow the clever lighting and emphasis on the songs to fill the stage. *Girl From The North Country* does not rely on the use of Dylan's songs to progress the story line, but they merely show small glimpses of character development but they do allow the songs to be heard in a different way. They suggest hopes and just out of reach dreams which, perhaps, could be achievable in a different time or place.

With a couple instruments dotted around, the on-stage band effortlessly allowed scenes and songs to softly transition into one another. They brought such beauty to the melodies and, with subtle sounds of gospel and folk, allowed the truly talented cast to shine. There were familiar songs in there such as "Like A Rolling Stone" which was excellent and sung by Frances McNamee who played the distressed Elizabeth. I was very taken by the song "Duquesne Whistle" which is sung by Ross Carswell who plays Elias. I think that was probably the highlight of the show for me.

The musical is perhaps aimed at the more mature theatre goers who don't want the more fast-paced musical to learn all the words to. This lends itself to Dylan's music and the moments of loneliness, solitude and longing that he wrote about so well. With a show made up of such passion, intensity, emotion, and power, if you're a fan of theatre or of Dylan, definitely go and see it but if you would like to see a musical that will open your heart and mind to a world of new songs and melodies definitely go and see the *Girl from the North Country*. It's an emotional and extremely watchable production.