"A CHEERY SOUL" IS not DREARY

Let me say at once that I disagree with every critic who has reviewed Patrick White's "A Cheery Soul" at the Union Theatre. I found it to be a play of shattering impact; savage and merciless — but dramatically exciting.

I consider it both a sign of critical ignorance and artistic impertinence to examine White's play in terms of whether it shows people in a good or bad light.

To plead with White to love humanity a little more is not only to completely misunderstand him as an artist — it is irrelevant to any discussion of whether his play is successful.

Certainly White's central character, a clinche-ridden, banal, empty-headed pusillanimous spinster, barren emotionally and physically, is one of the most frightening women ever to appear in a modern play.

Certainly White's thesis that there is a sin of goodness when it interferes with people's lives and masquerades behind masochism, is not designed to make you feel that happy days are here again.

Certainly life does not consist of people behaving only at the level of lost and lonely animals as White suggests. Certainly his anti-religion is somewhat forced, even if it is funny.

And certainly some of his language, especially in the refurbished Greek chorus of old bats that pass for humans, is pretentious in a Patrick White sort of way.

But with Nita Pannell giving an incredible performance, a devoted production from John Sumner and a general high level of supporting performances, "A Cheery Soul" shows us that Patrick White can dramatically wrap most of his contemporaries, plain human beings and other playwrights included, around his little finger.—AVI-EZER.
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