

A tale of the dark side

Aided only by a wig, Jon Lovell pulls off the Jekyll and Hyde illusion

Newbury Nomads: Jekyll and Hyde, at the Corn Exchange, from Wednesday, October 6 to Saturday, October 9

Jekyll and Hyde is a story of contrasts, not only between the learned Dr Jekyll and his alter ego Edward Hyde, but between the rich and the impoverished, the sophisticated and the raunchy.

Director Amanda Maskell and her team highlighted these differences with lighting and with costumes chosen carefully so that there were always one or two in vivid crimson, evocative of the murderous theme.

The chorus of bawdy doxies were an absolute joy to watch as they threw themselves into mob mode, occasionally black-toothed, and keeping low to accentuate the difference between themselves and the smartly-dressed upper crusters. Chorus singing, and indeed the singing throughout, was sharply crisp, matched by the choreography, indicative of long hours of rehearsal.

The large orchestra under the direction of Nic Cope played virtually throughout the performance and excellent though they undoubtedly were, as always, the same old problem of no pit resulting in performers being drowned out showed, particularly in the first half, although there was a noticeable improvement after the interval. Some minor performers who were not miked were often difficult to hear.

Jon Lovell (Dr Jekyll) superbly and dramatically changed into the murderer Hyde, aided only by a wig, and the scene where the two halves of his character talk to each other, necessitating Lovell turning his head to maintain the dual illusion, was excellently done. Both he and his loyal friend, Utterson (a quality performance from Stuart Honey) had the voices to fit the roles as did Sasha Robaczynski playing Emma, Jekyll's bride-to-be.

Samantha Buckley was outstanding as streetgirl Lucy and the duet *It's a Dangerous Game* with Jekyll was tautly dramatic, a highspot of the evening.

I have said before that NOMADS breadth of talent results in excellence in minor roles and this was again apparent with particularly good performances from Paul Hyde, Mark Craig, Russell Barrett, Chris Rands, Mike Scott-Cound, Jeanette Maskell, and Daniel Maskell in the cameo role of Spider.

Although Jekyll is not, I confess, my favourite musical, NOMADS undoubtedly succeeded in this challenging production and are an example to any musical society of what can be achieved with hard work, flair, imagination and talent.

CAROLINE FRANKLIN