



Naseeruddin Shah Masterful In 'Ismat Apa Ke Naam'

Earlier this month we wrote about Bollywood Naseeruddin Shah bringing the stories of famous Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai.

We had the privilege to attend this production last night at Brampton's beautiful Rose Theatre and it didn't disappoint.

The writing of Ismat, who was known for her indomitable spirit and fierce feminist ideology, was brought to life by the cast that included Shah, Heeba Shah and Ratna Pathak.

We were a bit concerned the play may feel a bit disjointed, with its focus on three short stories from the author's writings, but the appropriate lighting, seamless transitions and performances by the cast made it feel like a well-oiled and cohesive production.

The music by Vishal Bhardwaj was also appropriate for each of the stories and the quick set changes, which consisted of a 'manji' (bed) and curtains, allowed the play to flow smoothly from one story to the next.

Naseeruddin Shah was warmly welcomed by the crowd as he introduced the audience to the work of Ismat Chughtai. He informed us the stories were taken word for word from the writings and explained how the audience would be able to take away from each of them.

The first story was called 'Chui Mui' and narrated by his daughter Heeba Shah. It told the tale of a woman whose primary ambition in life was to become pregnant. She thought it would ensure her husband wouldn't leave her for another woman. But after a child is born in a train compartment, we are shown three differently affected women.

The second story called 'Mughal Bacha' brought Ratna Pathak on stage. It was set in the period following the decline of the Mughals. It told the story of how wives of some of the most powerful rulers dealt with their sudden failure and remnants of their glory.

Finally, the third story of the evening was called 'Gharwali' and narrated by Naseeruddin Shah himself. But Shah made sure the wait was worth it as he slipped in and out of different characters, including one of an old man, with ease.

His mannerisms and the understanding of the subtly, an area his daughter was clearly still working on, really showed why the actor is so highly regarded in Bollywood.

The story was a satire on the institution of marriage in the 1940s. Even so, it was revealing to see that Ismat's take on the role of men and women, in many ways, may be as true today as when she first took pen to paper.

Overall, after having seen the play, it would be difficult to imagine this production without the talents of Naseeruddin Shah. The actor brought a unique feel that is tough to replicate so if you have a chance to see this on stage, don't miss the opportunity.

