

A View On Access at the Old Vic – London

The Divide by Alan Ayckbourn

Audio described performance – Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2018  
1pm.

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As I continue my tour of different theatres all over the UK and sample an array of plays and musicals totally different from each other in style and tone, every now and again I stumble upon a production so unique and radically different that it takes my breath away and makes me so thankful that an audio description and touch tour has been made available due to how ambitious it is in design, scope and visual creativity.

This is most definitely the case with Alan Ayckbourns - the Divide that started life as a 6 hour play in two parts in Edinburgh and was transformed into a more compact 3 hour 50 minute affair for its 10 day run at the Old Vic.

The divide is more like a novel for the stage than your conventional play that brings to life a diary style account of events characterising a handful of solo voices and is set in a dystopian future where a plague has forced men and women into a forced separation hence the title the divide and illustrates the consequences of this and explores the divisions caused as a result and is predominantly told from a young girl's points of view through to her teenage years.

Due to its complex subject matter and experimental convention the production also employs some very creative elements including a full live choir and innovative projections like a waterfall and relevant written text constantly projected on to

backdrops plus unusual costumes and out of the ordinary staging like characters interacting on higher or lower levels and platforms.

All of the above demonstrates the need for an audio description and touch tour to enable those visually impaired to fully comprehend all the visual elements that unfold on stage and to provide a greater sense of understanding.

The old Vic's audio description team were excellent delivering superb introduction and narration throughout working hand in hand with the soundscape of the performance and enhancing its interpretation every step of the way to the highest standards you can imagine.

My only sadness was the fact that only 3 people including, myself participated in the description through the headset provided and I just wish a few more had embraced this wonderful fresh and exciting theatre experience or those sceptical of description took the plunge into the unknown and tried something new.

If you're reading this I ask that you do your bit to promote audio described performances and touch tours to someone you think may benefit and embrace the whole experience.

The old Vic is one of those progressive theatres that is forever changing and challenging the norm and pushing the boundaries of what has gone before and therefore surprises and enhances the overall experience. Their commitment to access for all is second to none and needs to be celebrated and promoted on a wide scale so this passion and service can be appreciated and enjoyed by as many people as possible.

Tim Calvert

For the audio description association