

Charlotte St Pierre
Contextual & Critical Studies
December 2008

Assignment – The Wiz.

Theatre Production: The Wiz. Directed by Moria Clark and performed by National Diploma Performing Arts Students in their second year.

Theatre Venue and Date: Jellicoe Theatre, Friday 28th November.

Film name: The Wiz. Produced by Rob Cohen and directed by Sidney Lumet,

Film Venue and Date: Cinema room, Friday 5th December.

These two adaptations of The Wiz tell the popular well known 1939 story of The Wizard Of Oz, in which Dorothy and beloved dog Toto are swept away during a storm ending up in a different land and embark on a exciting adventure to find their way home whilst meeting other troubled characters on the way who also are in need of help.

The theatre performance of The Wiz was a lot more entertaining in my opinion compared to the film adaptation.

Having a knowledge of the storyline from The Wizard Of Oz but not knowing of The Wiz, I had a vague idea of what to expect story wise, but it wasn't until watching the film that I was aware that all the characters were actually African Americans which made it completely different to the characters in The Wizard Of Oz, yet I did notice that the language used throughout the play was that of a black American nature and assumed that this was not used for any particular reason to portray the characters until I saw the film.

The acting in the play was done brilliantly with the over the top exaggeration from 'the munchkins' and comedy moments provided by each the lion, scarecrow and tin man. The film however didn't grasp my attention in the same way that the theatre production did, and I found the film to be quite dull at times, perhaps partly due to the play seeming more modernised as apposed to the dark and aged style of the film.

I think that one of the downfalls for each the play and the film was the singing, although The Wiz is a musical I felt that there was far too much song in both performances, possibly this might also be more appealable to a fan of motown music.

The characters in the play didn't particularly have the best singing voices but despite this I felt that they did their all to perform each song to the best of their ability.

The movement and energy throughout the play was also exceptionally well played, the scarecrow always remembered to walk with a slight wobble, the tin man never failed to move in any other way from the robotic stiff tin man style, and the lion created a huge amount of energy on stage with fast paced movements.

The characters in the film did have the same energy about them as on stage but despite this I just didn't feel the same warmth for them as I did for the characters played on stage.

The lion didn't have the same cheekiness as he did on stage, the tin man although acting with the same style as the character in the film just seemed to have a bigger likeability in the stage performance as well as the scarecrow (played by Michael Jackson in the film) who I personally found a little scary looking on film whereas I believe that he was supposed to come across quite differently. But most importantly is the performance given by the main character of both the film and the play; Dorothy.

On stage I found Dorothy to be a sweet, innocent girl from Kansas wanting to find her way home, and the actress playing this part on stage delivered with sincerity and made the

audience feel for her, whereas I found Diana Ross who played Dorothy on film to be rather irritating with over use of her facial expressions and acting performance, this may have been better and more convincing in the late 70's when this film was released but it doesn't have the same effect 30 years on.

The costumes used on stage were made brilliantly; tin man's especially looking the part, almost exactly the same to the costume worn by Nipsey Russell in the film adaptation. The Lion had face paint, wore a brown coloured top with trousers and a tail and had their hair backcombed to create a mane which looked very effective, not to mention the scarecrow who had straw poking out from various parts of his body.

Expecting The Wiz to be very similar to The Wizard of Oz, I thought that Dorothy would have been wearing a blue dress and red slippers, but in fact she wore a white dress with silver slippers, which were worn on the feet of Evermean, The Wicked Witch of the East in the film.

One thing that was missing from Dorothy throughout the stage performance was Toto the dog, which was featured throughout the film but was only briefly mentioned at the very beginning of the play to allow the audience to realise that Toto had run off somewhere out of sight.

The stage featured a dark backdrop with 'The Wiz' written in glitter in the centre, many different props were used throughout the performance, glow sticks, sunflowers and a playground to name a few.

A disco ball was used with high energy music to create an upbeat tempo and the characters in the play involved the audience a lot with a scene where crows will pinch various objects from unsuspecting crowd members and the 'yellow brick road; being the walkway between the audience seats.

The film's set seemed to be too dark at times, making it difficult to see what was going on, especially when Dorothy first arrived in Oz.

The way in which Dorothy was transported to Oz in both the film and the play is quite different, with the scene in the film showing her being whisked up into a storm and falling into Oz, whereas on stage this is a little tricky to denote, so the travelling aspect was shown by dancers acting out a air hostess routine to show the audience what was happening.

A lot of different colour lighting is used in both the play and the film, especially when Dorothy and her friends reach Emerald City which is basked in green lighting, changing as the fashion does, and also with the Poppy Field scene where the 'poppies' (dancers dressed in red) attempt to put Dorothy and the Lion to sleep with magic dusting powders.

Gobo's are also used to create a 'rolling brick' effect on the yellow brick road.

After seeing both the theatre and film adaptation of The Wiz if I had the chance to see either of them again it would be the theatre performance without hesitation.

The stage adaptation delivers so much more fun and comedy, and as an audience member you feel you can join in with the madness that Oz brings.

Perhaps if I had been around in 1978 and watched The Wiz on screen when it was first released at the time then I would have a different view on it all, but as it is I thoroughly enjoyed watching The Wiz on stage and believe that this version can always deliver a modern adaptation whereas the film will always be dated.

If you are looking for a fun, interactive and impressive performance then the Jellicoe Theatre's adaptation of The Wiz is definitely for you.

