

views from the gods

saints and sinners of the stage and screen

PLAYS

COMEDY

FILMS

MUSICALS

FEATURES

OTHER

CONTACT

Scenes from a Well-spent Youth The Phoenix Artist Club 7th August 2014

According to the saying, a change is as good as a rest. Certainly, after cramming in musicals, plays and physical theatre as part of the Camden Fringe, it's refreshing to enjoy a simple cabaret-style collection of pop music, rearranged for a single piano and voice.



Photography supplied by Tim Benton

The voice in question belongs to Tim Benton, a New Zealand performer who has a background in musical theatre (Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*, Pilate in *Jesus Christ Superstar*) and a love of a broad range of popular songs from the 60s and 70s. Working with Simon Wallace, who plays piano and produces the set, the pair have taken a collection of different tunes and styles which they have rearranged for a trip down memory lane. A flyer calls the act "a reflective trawl through some great songs of a fertile era in pop music" which summarises it very well.

The choice of venue works well for a nostalgic set like this, not least due to the amazing collection of posters old and new which adorn the bar area. The great and good of the West End smile benevolently upon the audience as they wait to enter the cozy and intimate main space.

Benton emerges dressed in a smart pair of trousers and a simple checked shirt, looking clean-cut and confident. Wallace is hidden by the upright but certainly makes his presence known, the loud melodies occupying an equal space to Benton's warm, slightly husky tones. There's a note of Johnny Cash inherent within his voice, and his musical theatre experience shines through in truly excellent diction - every phoneme is clear as a bell.

The set list starts off strongly with a mixture of the cheery (Neil Sedaka's *Laughter in the Rain*) and a truly lovely interpretation of Simon & Garfunkel's *America*. The running order includes some intelligent choices, such as pairing the opening number from *Hair, Aquarius, alongside San Francisco*, a huge hit during the Summer of Love. This hippy-esque segment acquires a real poignancy when sung by a performer remembering his youth. Another highlight is the stripped-back version of The Kinks' *Waterloo Sunset*, which is stunning in its simplicity - Benton's storytelling here is just right.

Classic songs from performers such as the glorious Carole King, Dusty Springfield and Joni Mitchell are also included.

When Benton steps up the pace, for Bob Dylan's *The Times They Are a Changin'*, the result is a genuinely rousing, almost powerful interpretation of a classic work and it's a pity that this is the finale - I could have watched more performances like this.

There's a real geniality about the set as a whole, primarily from Benton's voice and cheery stage demeanour, which includes some gentle patter; it suits the timeframe of the material and adds to the reflective feel of the set. If you're looking for vocal riffs and visual spectacle, you'd be better with an actual West End show, but if you fancy a cheery wander down memory lane and a night that leaves you a little happier, wait for this act to return - or pick up the CD of the same name.

Scenes from a Well-spent Youth ran on 7th August 2014 at the Phoenix Artist Club, as part of the Camden Fringe.

*Nearest tube station: Tottenham Court Road (**Northern, Central**)*