



'Spring Awakening' at University of Maryland at Clarice Smith Performing Arts by Jessica Vaughan

Posted on **March 1, 2014** by **Jessica Vaughan**

Like { 276

Tweet { 5

Print



Myth and metaphor collide in the University of Maryland School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies' production of *Spring Awakening*. Three directors create layer upon layer of design, dance, and song for this unique piece. Tony Award winner Brian MacDevitt co-directs with Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig. The latter two also choreograph.



— 'The Bitch of Living.' Photo by Stan Barouh.

They choose to enhance the main story lines with a troupe of ghostly dancers they call elementals who spent a semester workshoping the intense movements of the piece. The designers of set, costume, and lighting built upon this foundation for an unusually cohesive and creative vision.

Steven Sater wrote the book and lyrics and Duncan Sheik composed this unique mix of modern teenage rebellion, rock and roll, and traditional German moral values, based on a Nineteenth Century play by Frank Wedekind.

The set by Ruthmarie Tenorio focuses on an old oak growing in the middle of an empty stage. It grows within an ancient building and in a clever bit of efficient staging, features chairs hung upon the wall. Windows open into a paradise of greenery. Lighting Designer Robert Denton is very busy with many gobos throwing designs across the stage in key scenes. The elementals are decked out by Costume Designer Kara Waala in ghostly muslin that echo the traditional costumes of the main actors of the piece,

The strongest parts of this production of *Spring Awakening* are the big numbers like "Totally Fucked" and the finale "The Song of Purple Summer" when the entire cast of actors and dancers weave together. Even the dramatic scenes seem dreamlike as chairs come on and off the wall and lights pool on one tableau or another as the students in the play explore their bodies, minds, and souls in this musical that won eight Tony Awards during its 2006 Broadway debut.

Zac Brightbill (Melchior) is the bright light at the center of this tragedy. His charisma is equal to the role and he acquits himself well on the dramatic "All That's Known" and "Those You've Known." Megan Morse Jans (Wendla) has a beautiful voice and the perfect tragic air for the opening "Mama Who Bore Me." Daniel Smeriglio (Moritz) is a standout; a great voice with some powerful acting chops to back them up on his numbers like "And Then There Were None" and "Left Behind" and his heart-wrenching "Don't Do Sadness."

Sara Thompson, Jessica Krenek, David Gregory, and Allan Davis play three or four roles each as the adults in the play that let things go so terribly wrong for these youngsters.

Natalie Carlyle and Jenay McNeil (Martha and Ilse) are fabulous on the heartbreaking "The Dark I Know Well." McNeil has an excellent voice. The whole cast of supporting actors and dancers back the main players well.



— The cast of 'Spring Awakening.' Photo by Stan Barouh.

William Yanesh, the guest musical director and conductor of the production, leads a talented pit orchestra and the entire cast, including the dancers who also sang on the big numbers. They assert that playwright Frank Wedekind would have loved this production, and that is probably true. The extreme collaboration between director, designer, and artist has made for a weird and wonderful piece. The directors have definitely made this their own, filled with supreme attention to detail and otherworldly metaphor backed by a design fighting between the outside paradise and the decaying classroom.

The main joy for me was watching these talented young performers thrive in the ultimate musical about youth. This *Spring Awakening* is one you must see!

Running time: Two hours and 15 minutes, with one 15-minute intermission.



Spring Awakening plays through March 8, 2014 at the Kay Theatre of the Clarice Smith Center Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland College Park – University of Maryland Stadium Drive, in College Park, MD. Purchase tickets [online](#).

LINK

Breaking Boundaries with Design at University of Maryland's 'Spring Awakening,' Which Opens February 28th by Emily Schweich.