

British Theatre Guide

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Lord of the Flies

William Golding, adapted for the stage by Nigel Williams

Regent's Park Open Air Theatre

New Victoria Theatre, Woking

17–19 September 2015

[Regent's Park Open Air Theatre was the perfect venue](#) for this multi-award winning production with the open space and woodland surrounding the stage making the desert island setting appear perfectly natural, although even there (when I saw it four years ago) there was little actual performance space with the fuselage of a wrecked plane and spilled luggage littering the scene.

This problem was cleverly overcome by freezing some of the action while activities took place elsewhere. Now that the theatre is touring the play, “reaching out to new audiences beyond the park”, the biggest problem must have been fitting this beautifully staged production behind a proscenium arch and into a smaller area.

The New Victoria stage is large and they have extended it over the orchestra pit with the wings of the wrecked plane becoming part of the playing area so the space problem has been addressed, and the ‘freezing’ of the action has been replaced by slow motion sections which I assumed ought to have focused our attention elsewhere, but if so I must have missed it.

The story is a chilling one pointing out the very thin veneer of conformity covering the savagery which is present in the human psyche—is it significant that all the characters here are male?

They are all schoolboys, their plane has crashed on a desert island where they are highly delighted to find they are on their own here and free to do whatever they like. They go wild with excitement, running, jumping, pushing each other and scrambling over the plane—just being boys—but eventually reason creeps in and Ralph, the first to arrive on the beach, appoints himself leader.

The conch shell they found will give whoever is holding it a right to speak and be heard. A nice bit of democracy here introduced by the sensible Piggy, but soon to be shattered.

The group of upper class choir boys who march in are all kept in order by their leader Jack because, as he says, “we have to be normal or we’ll end up as savages”. Pity his ‘normality’ doesn’t last; the boys soon divide into two rival gangs, the hunters and the shelter builders, with the rivalry between them soon turning to combat. They could have worked so well together but war is war. Isn’t that, sadly, the way of the world?

It is amazing, and frightening, what a strong effect rhythmic chanting can have on a group. It works very well with “stamp, stamp, stamp your feet” creating a frenzy of stamping to put out a spreading fire, but when it comes to “kill the pig, spill his blood” the excitement mounts, blood lust takes over, and things get really out of hand leading to the death of Keenan Munn-Francis’s gentle and thoughtful Simon and poor Piggy also coming to a tragic end.

Piggy, fat, wearing glasses and not speaking 'proper', is the obvious target, yet if they had only listened to him tragedy could have been avoided.

Performances by all these young boys are superb, with special mention for Anthony Roberts as the tormented Piggy, Luke Ward-Wilkinson as the reasonable Ralph and Freddie Watkins excellent as the autocratic Jack. Also David Evans representing the 'Littluns' is a delight thinking (or hoping) that's all a game.

A very dramatic and effective production of a disturbing yet totally gripping theme.

Reviewer: [Sheila Connor](#)