



***'I OUGHT TO BE IN PICTURES'*** by Neil Simon

**Peridot Theatre**

Directed by *Michelle Swann*

Reviewed by *Ken Barnes* – 27 March 2022 (matinee)

As you know, Neil Simon is a celebrated writer, partly noted for his nuanced approach to human relationships and family life in all their tortuous forms – love, hate, misunderstandings – often with a mixture of comedy and pathos. In 'I Ought to be in Pictures' the writer focuses on the lives of three Americans: Herb, who split with his wife 16 years ago, his girlfriend Steffy who visits for a passionate encounter once a week, and his 19-year-old daughter Libby who suddenly reappears and makes dramatic changes to Herb's life.

Andrew McAliece is an actor whose performances I have enjoyed in the past, and this was no exception. As Herb, he played a basically decent fellow but with a demanding life as a script-writer, plus other historical complexities which are brought to the surface by his interaction with the other characters. Andrew's articulation and projection were first rate and his nuanced movements and facial expressions certainly clicked with the audience.

His daughter Libby was played enthusiastically by Eva Hatzicostas, the feisty and seemingly confident daughter he had not seen since she was 3, but who suddenly re-appears in his life. Libby's mannerisms and assertive delivery soon had us all glued to the stage because Eva was able to bring out that rough and tumble New York persona. Because the role quite often called for a fast-talking fusillade of words, I sometimes had trouble understanding their meaning; but that was Libby to a T.

In contrast, Steffy was calm and balanced; a role also extremely well played by Jeanne Snider. Her portrayal of the conciliatory, mature woman left us in no doubt that Jeanne was well-chosen for the part. Steffy was often the one who brought things together, notably in one of the poignant final scenes where Herb speaks to his ex-wife and estranged son on the telephone.

Interactions between the three characters were so realistic that at times one felt like yelling, "Stop this misunderstanding!" or "For pity's sake give her a hug!" Indeed, the subtle gestures, believable accents and each actor's ability to absorb his or her character all made the audience feel part of the story.

As usual with Peridot, the wide set was well-designed with furniture and props arranged appropriately, believable costumes, doors and a window to fit the story-line, changes to emphasise the different time periods and catchy music between scenes. The backstage crew were certainly on the ball.

Michelle Swann is certainly a talented director. She was able to bring out the writer's mix of humour and angst in a subtle way. She had assembled an equally impressive cast, each actor conveying the colourful personality demanded of his or her role. It was a treat, and just what we needed in these gloomy times.

Ken Barnes