***Big Things* review**

9th&10th April 2013

Ballina Players Theatre

Review by Byron Christie

Tumultuous dance-battle scenes, vivacious, soulful and energetic songs and sophisticated acting – what’s not to like!

Big things, the Southern Cross School production - including students from Ballina High School - was a great evening that showcased the talents of many students in an excellent form. The play, written and directed by Ali Chigwidden promotes the idea that young people from the past have been vital influences that have changed the course of history.

In a classroom full of disengaged students, one history teacher is able to inspire with his stories of young individuals such as Mulan, Joan of Arc, Cleopatra and the teenage Anzacs. Each part of his lesson leads us off on a vignette full of colour and sound, including some superb ensemble performances.

There were numerous highlight performances, such as Mary (Bethany Young) who brought us into her prenatal class (for her second child) and retold the tale of her tumultuous journey to Bethlehem with both humour and conviction. Mr Martin (Jack Hawkins) effectively played the lynchpin of the whole production, demonstrating wisdom beyond his years. There were many, many others who were given their moment in the spotlight and performances failed to disappoint.

The high level of musical ability from the students was also eye-opening. From the opening thrashed out bars of *Prisoner of Society* by the Living End (sung by Joel Puzey) to the moving lyrics and beat-boxing throughout *I Was Only Nineteen,* by Red Gum & The Herd (sung by Jasper O’Maley), sweet and poignant harmonies of *From Little Things Big Things Grow* by Paul Kelly (Sung by Elijah Hickling, Mollie Duncan, Jasper & the Southern Cross Choir) and many others, the flexible orchestra showed off their individual and collective talents. Musical directors Marc Mittag and Dave Drinkwater were able to seamlessly coordinate the needs of the play with stirring recitals.

The choreography took the ensemble moments of the play to extraordinary heights, with clear, symbolic and often quirky movement to explore historical events such as Mulan and Joan of Arc’s wars to free their people. Choreographer Belinda Toth is to be congratulated on the sense of exuberance that was brought to the stage.

Technically, this work was at a professional level. Audio-video displays and complex lighting design (by Amelia Perris) captured and enhanced the mood and energy of each scene. Stage manager Kim Edwards and her team did well to coordinate the movement of over 90 students.

This play is a testament to the creative teachers at Southern Cross school, who have collaborated and produced a quality piece of work that was truly inspirational. One audience member commented to the reviewer “I can’t believe we got all that for $10! I’ve paid $80 to see a show before that wasn’t half as good.” It was probably a risk for the Ballina Players to present a high school show at the Swift Street Theatre, but this was a win for them, as many audience members commented that they never knew the theatre was even there! It is a great space and suited the massive production well.

This is a great example of public education at its comprehensive best and there are certainly big things going on at Southern Cross.