

**Front Row Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2006 at 7.15pm**

**THATCHER THE MUSICAL REVIEW**

**Guest review: Former Tory Minister and writer GEORGE WALDEN**

**KL = Kirsty Lang**

**GW = George Walden**

Cabinet Shuffle song as introduction.

**KL:** We've had David Blunkett The Musical, Jerry Springer The Opera etc so its amazing we've had to wait this long.

Thatcher The Musical is created by Foursight Theatre, an all-woman troupe from Wolverhampton whose speciality is to create biographical history through the eyes of women.

Co-director Naomi Cooke says the show's intention was to neither denigrate nor glorify but to present Maggie as herself looking back over her meteoric rise from grocer's daughter to one of the most powerful women in the world.

Maggie was a very devious person in many ways yet this is quite an affectionate portrayal in many ways. Were you expecting more of a character assassination ?

**GW:** Frankly yes. Coventry is in the Midlands and is closer to the coal than London and it is frankly a student audience so the worst was to be expected from Maggie's point of view. But it was actually much better than that as a good satire has to be essentially truthful and this was, of course, satire but it was very truthful too. Above all it gave Maggie her say and she always makes sure she gets her say.

**KL:** Her ministers didn't emerge very well ... being portrayed as penguins or sheep waddling about the place ... weak and wet and constantly being bashed around the head by handbags ... As a former minister, was this a fair portrayal ?

**GW:** Of course, there was a lot of that... in the reality and in the production. That's perfectly natural. The slight weakness of this musical which I otherwise greatly enjoyed was that it's a bit doubtful playing it with an all-female troupe because I think it was important to show her hand-bagging the males as true males rather than women dressed as males. On the other hand, there were so many strengths in the show. The idea of having maybe 3 or 4 Thatchers on stage at the same time showing the different ages... it also represented her ubiquity ... there she was in every corner of English life in every moment of the play. That was extremely funny. There were lots of good 'bad' jokes. "Denis Thatcher is the name, paints and plastics is the game". Very good. Imaginative and intelligent. The opening scene is brilliant with a massive handbag coming on stage which unfolds as a laptop and she sits inside that like a TV studio to give interviews. So its pretty smart stuff.

**KL:** It rattles through a lot of history ?

**GW:** Yes. And it is actually true to the history. They make the claim (and as far as I can tell from impressionistic memory it is true) that more or less everything they say is actually the case or from her statements or from what it is said she has said. So you got something that was sharp and naturally critical. There is a bit of pathos. They allowed her to give

one or two of her more effective truthful speeches before her first election in 1979 as well as the more obvious moments so I think it was very well done.

**KL:** What about the music ?

**GW:** I think I would have preferred a real band possibly. Instead of which it was mostly piano. But there were some very good numbers. The Cabinet Shuffle. I've Got The Urge To Purge. I liked Maggie doing a disco dancing number.

**KL:** I understand at one point she is jumping about screaming about Europe in almost a punk style.

**GW:** That's right. That's very funny and the sentiments and the dancing somehow marry up. She's stamping and shouting "No, no no " and "Niet, niet, niet". And all that worked tremendously well. And they were very careful to start the music with Grantham in the 1950's with almost church like organ stuff and then finish up with that. So all in all, I think it was a very good effort.

**KL:** So briefly, will it have broad appeal to Tories and non-Tories alike ?

**GW:** I think it will and people tend to feel quite strongly one way or the other. There is an element of truthfulness in this as well as good comic satire.

**KL:** Thank you George. Thatcher The Musical is on in Coventry until Saturday and then I think its going to go on tour.