

TERRA NOVA

by Ted Tally

Fort Worth Community Arts

Center

Photos by Adriana Bate.

CREW

Director: Bert Pigg

Stage Manager: Makinzy Springer

Light Designer: Brian Douglas

Set Designer: Jason Leyva

Sound & Video: Joshua Hahlen

Costumes & Props: Cast & Crew

CAST

Robert Falcon Scott: Malcolm Stephenson

Amundsen: David Graham

Kathleen: Meagan Harris

Bowers: Shawn Gann

Oates: Joshua Hahlen

Wilson: Andrew Manning

Evans: Carter Frost

Reviewed Performance: 11/23/2019

Reviewed by Cat Jimenez, Associate Critic for John Garcia's THE COLUMN

Terra Nova is a true story based on the journal of Captain Robert Falcon Scott throughout his second trip to Antarctica, known as the Terra Nova expedition. He had a four-man team consisting of Lt. Henry “Birdie” Bowers, Capt. Lawrence “Titus” Oates, Doctor Edward “Bill” Wilson, P.O. Edgar “Taffy” Evans, as well as his memories of his beloved wife Kathleen and the mental image and memory of his rival, the Norwegian Roald Amundsen.

Racing Amundsen with no assistance from animals, lack of time, and several mishaps throughout the trip was too much to survive. None of the Englishmen made it back from their expedition. This is the harrowing story of their trip and frost-bitten final days.

The director, Bert Pigg, made this play more than people performing on stage. This was a window into the cold, cruel, intense world that Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his men had to endure. I was completely engaged in their agonies, laughs, and when the time came, deaths. It takes a good director to take a story that you know the ending to already, and still have it be completely heartbreaking. Maybe the director was so good at directing his actors because he trained as an actor himself at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Bert has directed more than forty productions in England and throughout the United States. This show was a masterpiece.

When watching this play, I noticed very soon that lighting was a huge part of the artistry that built the atmosphere.

The stage that the show was performed on is a relatively small space, so the fact that Brian Douglas was capable of capturing the cold and desolate feeling of a vast ice desert for our protagonist to travel through and then capturing the safer, warmer solace of the inside of the tent that slightly sheltered them from the environmental cruelty with only the manipulation spotlights and color of lighting was absolutely impressive. I considered the lighting of this show to be a part of the set.

The rest of the set was simplistic for most of the show, occasionally changing as the main protagonist remembered, imagined, or fantasized. As the group of men marched through Antarctica, the space around them was mostly empty except for the provisions they brought along. This helped to enforce the truly isolated feeling, the almost palpable loneliness that Captain Scott and his men must have felt. Jason Leyva was the set designer, and he is also the owner and operator of the award-winning production company L.I.P Service. He has returned to the Fort Worth area to be Production Manager for FWCAC.

Malcolm Stephenson was such a wonderful choice for this role of Captain Robert Falcon Scott. The character requires a strong actor who can play a determined leader, a yearning adventurer, a husband who's not quite present but loves his wife, and in the end a transformed, tired, dying man. Stephenson fulfilled this strong role as a master. He has worked in Fort Worth and New York City and has recently worked on a film as well as a web series.

David Graham was Roald Amundsen, the man who rivals Scott. Amundsen is trying to win a victory for Norway in the race through Antarctica and is a stark contrast to Robert. He takes a more brutally realistic approach, while Scott holds a more virtuous view. Amundsen also appears to Scott in memories and visions, challenging Scott in his most desperate times. Graham did this character justice. He played the antagonist but shone just as brightly as the protagonist in a complimentary yet vastly different way. David Graham is a seasoned actor and knew how to play into the rival chemistry that he had to have with Malcolm to make their relationship such a vital part of the story.

Though the entire group of men cast as Captain Robert Falcon Scott's team during his expedition did a great job at being immersive and believable, the one who stood out to me most was Carter Frost. He played Edgar "Taffy" Evans, a character that must convey extreme pain, deep emotion, and ultimately insanity. Carter did an extraordinary job at being Taffy, I found myself cringing when his character was in pain. When he played a raving mad man, brought to his knees by this painful journey he had to endure, it truly helped me to understand the horrible condition these men were left in at the end of their lives. Carter was a memorable actor in this play, and the amount of intensity he displayed as an actor made me desperately want to see him in any other shows he might be doing. He states that this role is out of his comfort zone but that he loves a challenge, and all I can say is that he thrived on this challenge.

Overall, Terra Nova was a riveting, emotion-inducing, truly engaging way to tell the amazing story of the people involved in the ill-fated Terra Nova expedition. The true story aspect of this is

based on the actual writing of the deceased Captain and his crew, telling the real tale of their deaths, made this such an emotionally engaging play. The execution of this play had to capture all of that on stage and with this crew and cast it did. The amazing talent in this show, as well as the glimpses of photographs of the real men on the expedition all, painted a real, severe scene that made the audience a part of it.

The story of Captain Robert Falcon Scott and the Terra Nova Expedition is not one to be forgotten, especially after a show like this.