

Cold Comfort Farm by Paul Doust, based on the novel by Stella Gibbons, directed by Tanya Piejus
Stagecraft Theatre, Gryphon Theatre, 22 Ghuznee Street, till 15 November

Reviewed by Ewen Coleman

Making stage adaptations of classic novels is becoming quite prevalent; *Cold Comfort Farm* - Stella Gibbons 1930's satirical take on the romantic, doom-loaded novels of the time - is another in this vein. Like previous stage adaptations, condensing this complex story with its many settings is not easy and while Paul Doust's adaptation takes the story of Flora Poste, from London, going to stay with her eccentric relatives in the country at Cold Comfort Farm to a more farcical level than Gibbons's quietly comic novel, leaving a few characters out and changing the ending, it does work reasonably well as a stage play. To a great extent this was due to the way the adaptation was excellently realised by director Tanya Piejus and her production team. The incorporation of many quirky moments of business added to the action and dialogue - the plane flying in at the opening, the cut outs of the cows and extended family for "the count", the silhouette of Aunt Ada - were but a few of the many innovative and ingenious creations that added much to the humour and fun of the production. But this takes nothing away from the great ensemble playing of the large cast, many of whom played multiple roles, with excellently defined characters, certainly eccentric, and to an extent over the top, but never excessively or at the expense of the actual story. The competent and well-drilled cast were able to maintain pace and energy yet at the same time always being in control. In the title role of Flora Poste Charlotte Stephens give a stellar performance, holding the production together and adding sanity and balance to antics of her extended family. Of the fine performances of the family stand outs were Ginny Brewer as Aunt Ada Doom, continually going on about "something nasty in the woodshed", Alan Carabott as her naïve farmer son Reuben, Robert Hickey the fire and brimstone preacher Amos, Petra Donnison his wife Judith, obscenely obsessed with her son Seth, Greg Hornsby making this a very entertaining and satisfying production to watch.