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she devised the piece, "Shared Experience" are "interested in theatre's potential to make visible what is hidden, to give form to the world of imagination, emotion and memory, to go beyond the surface of everyday life." There are no scene divisions, the scenes just flow into each other, even there are jumps in narrative. The actors have to play a range of parts, switching between characters in an instant. The fictional characters lives and by the sisters, to inhabit the stage as metaphors for the inner selves of the writers. I have come out of the experience of directing this production knowing more of when I started. I hope the cast for the same and I am sure the audience will too if they allow "the power of the imagination to transcend time and place and circumstance, to take us to places we cannot otherwise go."

Ingrid Corrigan top of page Reviews The NewsMike Allen Imaginative world of the Bronts Polly Teale's play is specifically about one of history's most remarkable literary families, the Bronts of Haworth in Yorkshire. More widely it is about the world of the imagination. It was written for Shared Experience, a theatre company that uses physical expressionism to delve - imaginatively - beneath the surface of events. Not an easy style for non-professional companies. Ingrid Corrigan, directing for Bench Theatre, achieves the merging of actors into historical figures into fictional characters well. But the emergence of the ghosts of Cathy (from Wuthering Heights) and Bertha (Jane Eyre) from behind permanent black curtains seems like a single contrived device rather than part of a broader concept as Shared Experience would make it. Yet the sense of claustrophobia among the three Bront sisters and brother Branwell is powerfully achieved, and much of the acting is admirable. Alice Corrigan gives possibly her finest performance to date as a bossy, raging Charlotte, and that makes Francesca McCrohon's brooding stillness and troubled questioning as Emily all the more telling. David Penrose is delightful both as their gently-spoken father and - within moments - as his comically tiptoeing curate. And the same actor's Mr Rochester is especially touching in his blindness. But Penrose unwittingly highlights a weakness elsewhere. The accuracy of his Irish accent exposes distractingly inconsistent Yorkshire tones elsewhere. If the cast cannot manage that, better to abandon the attempt altogether. Further performances tonight and from next Tuesday to Saturday. The News, 25th April 2008 Southampton EchoJill Rumsey Bront - Bench Theatre - Havant Arts Centre Full marks to this group of six talented actors and back-stage crew who did full justice to the sometimes harrowing tale of the Bront family. From the opening scene where background information is imparted by the sisters prior to their donning period costume, the story unfolds seamlessly. Director Ingrid Corrigan made the most of scene transformations - necessary in this three-hour play. Alice Corrigan (Charlotte), Francesca McCrohon (Emily) and Lorraine Galliers (Anne) each made personal interpretations of the characteristics of the three sisters to great effect. David Penrose as the father - and also in three other roles - and Lynda Fleming, as characters from two novels, both gave good performances. The director's set and sound design (Darryl Wakelin) deserved praise. Bront runs until May 3. Southampton Echo, 26th April 2008 top of page Page 8This play was staged at Havant Arts Centre, East Street Havant - Bench Theatre's home since 1977. It was staged as a double-bill in repertory with Ghost from a Perfect Place on alternate evenings throughout the 8-night run. The production was nominated for 'Best Amateur Drama' in The News 'Guide' Awards 2008. Damon Wakelin was nominated for 'Best Amateur Director' in The Southern Echo 'Curtain Call' Awards 2008. ATerry Smyth BJeff Bone CRobin Hall MJulie Wood Director Damon Wakelin Producer Charley Callaway Stage Manager John Wilcox Assistant Stage Manager Vicky Wakelin Lighting Design Damon Wakelin Lighting Operation Jacque Penrose Sound Design Darryl WakelinDamon Wakelin Sound Operation David Penrose Set Design Francine Huin-Wah Poster and Flier Design Martin McBride Front of House Manager Gina Farmer Whenever anyone has asked me what 'Crave' is about I have, perhaps flippantly, replied that I don't really know. This is not the usual stance for the director of a show, granted, but the truth is not so very far from the flippant. On the page, Crave can appear nigh-on impenetrable; four unnamed characters, all of whom seem to constantly switch both character and stylistic form, in a near narrative-free text. Where does one start? From the moment I first read the play, I knew there was something magical locked within it. The imagery is poignant, startling, original, savage, revelatory, beautiful and evocative - often all at the same time. Even without the relative security of a readily identifiable narrative structure, the fundamental element of theatre lies in the interaction of characters in a given time, place and space. So that is where we started; who are these people and how are they connected? The choices we have made may not be Kane's original intentions, but I feel it lives and breathes in a manner that is truthful, honest and unflinchingly direct. In identifying that M. (Julie Wood) is the central character we were able to extrapolate or trace back every exchange to her, from the physical and emotional abuse meted out by B. (Jeff Bone), to the interior dialogue and commentary provided by C. (Robin Hall), and again to the echoes of a past that M cannot escape provided by A. (Terry Smyth). We have made a sense of this play that conveys the stark beauty of Kane's language; that allows her, admittedly often quite dark, sense of humour to emerge and that allows her unexpected optimism to permeate its way through the tattered, shattered characters she has created for us. A word, maybe more, for the cast. Brave souls, all! Jeff, Julie, Robin and Terry have openly accepted every conceivable challenge and opportunity that a play like 'Crave' throws your way. They have grappled with HOURS of textual analysis as we sought to define character, structure, meaning, intention, text, and sub-text. They have wrestled stoically with a text so fragmented that I can only imagine how difficult it has been to learn - and then Terry had to learn that speech! (You'll know which one I mean, I promise) Once we started moving about, they have had to cope with choreography... yep; walking and talking at the same time. They have discovered that I am vaguely OCD when it comes to symmetry and particularly the exact location of centre stage. And through it all, we have laughed and laughed and laughed. The performances they have created are sincere, thoughtful, considered, honest and true. I am grateful to them and proud of them. Damon Wakelin top of page Reviews The NewsMike Allen Bench raise Kane to great heights Don't go looking for identifiable characters in Sarah Kane's play. They don't even have names. Don't go looking for cheap laughs. Yet although the controversial writer of Blasted and Cleansed was never one to court easy favour with audiences, Crave has a strangely lyrical and eloquent quality, and even a degree of admittedly black humour. Bench Theatre capture these qualities well under what seems to be inspired direction by Damon Wakelin. With no stage directions or even punctuation to help him and the four actors, he often avoids the obvious in terms of movement and inter-reaction, yet his decisions generally seem effortlessly right. No one is likely to understand even one word at a first hearing, but every shade of meaning appears to be burnt into the minds and souls of actors Terry Smith, Jeff Bone, Robin Hall and Julie Wood. It is impossible, of course to dissociate such despair from Sarah Kane's later suicide, yet the play ends on a pretty positive note. Crave runs for about 55 minutes. Bench are performing it in repertoire with another piece of 'in-yer-face theatre', Philip Ridley's 'Ghost From a Perfect Place', until July 26. The News, 18th July 2008 Southern Daily EchoHann Quentin Mostly free of a definite narrative, Sarah Kane's poetic drama must be interpreted differently by all who see or perform it. It says much for the work and for this production that this does not lead to any obscurity. Lack of tension or absence of emotional engagement. Two men (Jeff Bone and Terry Smyth) and two women (Robin Hall and Julie Wood) deliver rapid fire speeches and snatches of dialogue, that dramatise, among other things, lust, desire, perversion, love and the need for autonomy. Although a little too busy in places, director Damon Wakelin's staging mostly helps his very able cast to make the rapid transitions of character and feeling required, and his lighting design brings the show to an effective, moving conclusion. But the actors deserve equal credit for the depth, variety and energy they give to their performances. Smyth's delivery of the show's only long speech was outstanding. Southern Daily Echo, 25th July 2008 top of page Page 9This play was staged at Havant Arts Centre, East Street Havant - Bench Theatre's home since 1977. It was staged as a double-bill in repertory with Crave by Sarah Kane on alternate evenings throughout the 8-night run. Lynda Fleming was nominated for 'Best Amateur Actress' for her portrayal of Mr Sparks in The News 'Guide' Awards 2008. Martin McBride was nominated for 'Best Amateur Director' and was voted 'Best Newcomer' and Mark Wakeman was nominated for 'Best Amateur Actor' in The Southern Echo 'Curtain Call' Awards 2008. 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