



Directed by David Fletcher

Company

Martha Allen-Smith
Jo Banbury
Charlotte Dodd
John Fenner
Bryan Ferriman
David Fletcher
Glynis Fletcher
Jonathan Fletcher
Jessica Newborough

Rosie Pankhurst

Ann Rayns
Michael Rayns
Matthew Salisbury
Harry Sanders

Musicians

Martha Allen-Smith - Violin/Vocals
Jonathan Fletcher - Guitar/Mandolin/Vocals
Rosie Pankhurst - Accordion/Keyboard/Vocals
Matthew Salisbury - Guitar/Ukulele/Vocals

REVIEW BY NICK LE MESURIER, WARWICKSHIRE WORLD

This year marks the 70th anniversary of a landmark theatrical event, the broadcast on the BBC Third Programme of Under Milk Wood, Dylan Thomas's immortal evocation of a day in the life of Llareggub, a fictional seaside village in South Wales. Landmark, not only because the play has become a firm favourite down the years, the object of many film and stage adaptations, but because it has set the standard for a play for voices, a form that continues to thrill writers and actors and a core audience, though its popular heyday has long been eclipsed by TV. The Loft Theatre Company, Leamington Spa, this week recreates the original recording, performed as if in a 1950s recording studio.

It is possible to close your eyes during the performance and just listen to the speeches. If you do that you will be rewarded richly enough, for the music of the language is brought fully to life in the marvellous textures of the readings. Every voice is distinct, the Welsh accents convincing, the actors each slipping seamlessly between many voices, so that a whole landscape, physical and social, is warmly evoked.

But by watching this as an event in a recording studio we are treated to something more. The Company do not just read their lines but act the parts of actors reading lines by which they are obviously delighted, as well they might be. The set, of course, helps, complete as it is with period microphones, musicians, and the actors all in beautiful 1950s costumes.

I'm reluctant to single out individuals for their contribution, for this is really an ensemble piece. But I can't resist mentioning Jo Banbury as Polly Garter, whose lament for her long-lost "Little Willie Wee who is dead, dead, dead," is heart-breaking. Blind Captain Cat (Bryan Ferriman's) mental eulogy to Rosie Probert (Glynis Fletcher) adds a dark pathos to the play, as he imagines her forgetting him as she slides into the oblivion of death.

Dylan Thomas is said to have given only a simple piece of advice to his actors: "Love the words." Those words continue to sing in the Loft's evocation of this sad, funny, sentimental, glorious play.

Review in Leamington Observer

A CAST of eccentric inhabitants from a Welsh town brought to life in the mind of one of that nation's greatest writers makes a welcome and successful appearance on the stage in this creditable production.


Dylan Thomas's masterpiece for voices is in many ways inseparable from the 1950s recording made at the BBC featuring the unmistakable tones of Richard Burton. This production borrows a lot from the making of that legendary recording without at any time attempting to just impersonate it. A cast of about a dozen all reading from scripts – with evident preparation – all find characters of their own in the array of oddballs Thomas chose to populate his fictional town. The poetry of the language, and the continued use of narration rather than dialogue means this is not a natural stage play. But the Loft, under the direction of David Fletcher, have put a lot into the visuals to go with the voices. The actors move in and out of range of the microphones, hint at characterisation while still being radio actors and display clear enjoyment in each others' performances. The studio recording that this piece comprised would probably have had little for any audience to see but here there's enough to keep everyone entertained. A gentle and atmospheric musical score and an evocative design add to the overall flavour. One nice touch is the live sound effects provided in the studio. Town bells, slamming doors, creaking stairs all performed live to dovetail in with the words. If anything these 'backroom stars' could have been used a bit more. Under Milk Wood's appeal as a piece of poetry and sharp social observation will probably endure forever. This intelligent and sensitive production should point the way for future groups to move the richness of the text onto a wider stage.







‘Under Milk Wood’
 THE FIRST BROADCAST PERFORMANCE OF
 THE WORK SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR THE BBC BY
DYLAN THOMAS
 PRODUCED BY DOUGLAS CLEVERDON



First Voice..... <i>Richard Burton</i> Second Voice..... <i>Richard Bebb</i> Captain Cat..... <i>Hugh Griffith</i> Rosie Probert..... <i>Rachel Thomas</i> Polly Garter..... <i>Diana Maddox</i> Mr. Mog Edwards..... <i>Dafydd Havard</i> Myfanwy Price..... <i>Sybil Williams</i> Mrs. Ogmere-Pritchard..... <i>Dilys Davies</i> Mr. Ogmere..... <i>David Close-Thomas</i> Mr. Pritchard..... <i>Ben Williams</i> Butcher Beynon..... <i>Meredith Edwards</i> Gossamer Beynon..... <i>Diana Maddox</i> The Rev. Eli Jenkins... <i>Philip Burton</i> Lily Smalls..... <i>Gwyneth Petty</i>	Mr. Pugh..... <i>John Huw Jones</i> Mrs. Pugh..... <i>Mary Jones</i> Mary Ann Sailors..... <i>Rachel Thomas</i> Sinbad Sailors..... <i>Aubrey Richards</i> Dai Bread..... <i>David Close-Thomas</i> Mrs. Dai Bread One... <i>Gwenllian Owen</i> Mrs. Dai Bread Two... <i>Rachel Roberts</i> Willy Nilly Postman... <i>Meredith Edwards</i> Mrs. Willy Nilly..... <i>Olwen Brookes</i> Cherry Owen... <i>John Ormond Thomas</i> Mrs. Cherry Owen..... <i>Lorna Davies</i> Nogood Boyo..... <i>Dillwyn Owen</i> Organ Morgan..... <i>John Glyn-Jones</i> Mae Rose Cottage..... <i>Rachel Roberts</i>
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The songs set by Daniel Jones
 Children's songs and singing game recorded by children of Laugharne School

at 7.25