

Berkshire Theatre Group, Stockbridge, MA

Photograph 51 by Anna Ziegler. Directed by David Auburn.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“You are near perfection” “That I am.”

First produced locally by Williamstown Theatre Festival three years ago in its Audible Only season, “Photograph 51” starring Anna Chlumsky was a fascinating play about science and its professional relationships. Science is just not dramatic; people, however, are. Though this play is about science, about the advancement of knowledge, it is also about egos and challenges, about the chance discoveries and mysteries of the human mind and heart. It’s about the romance of two distant creatures who define human interactions that can’t be defined by science. It takes a long time for the romance to replace the intellectual aspects of these characters who inhabit this play by Anna Ziegler. It takes an hour and 46 minutes for the two principals, Rosalind Franklin, played by Rebecca Brooksher and Maurice Wilkins, played by David Adkins to realize what an opportunity has been missed. They have spent years together, each denying the other's human vagaries, only to have their work on the double helix of DNA usurped by colleague-rivals, while Rosalind battles cancer. These are lives not wasted but perhaps misspent, especially in the bright lights of sexism and prejudice. This is not an easy play.



The cast of Photograph 51. Photo: Emma K. Rothenburg-Ware

In its current production at the Unicorn Theatre in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, it is a play that sparkles with originality. The cast of six players move through the small world they inhabit



Rebecca Brooksher;
Photo: Emma K. Rothenburg-Ware

this works very well for this play. The strange British accents sometimes make the dialogue impossible to hear but the staging emphasizes the disparity of proper communication among the characters. This is Auburn's finest work at the BTG and it was well worth waiting for.

Scenic design by Bill Clarke, costume design by Elivia Bovenzi Blitz, lighting design by Daniel J. Kotlowitz, and the sound design by Scott Killian work well for this production. There is also projection design by Daniel J. Kotlowitz to aid us through the title image.

It's an intellectual two

on the small Larry Vaber stage with broad gestures and long steps. They expand the space with great concepts and long-awaited amenities. Rosalind is always polite and quietly longs to be addressed as "Doctor" while Maurice craves a smile which is almost never offered. Her human side emerges occasionally, mostly when Ray Gosling joins their band of social rogues (played nicely by Brandon Dial). There is almost romance, but that is still in the distance in this play. The power of professionalism exposed by Brooksher and Adkins in their roles makes the play a wonder and an anomaly. Their painful professionalism costs them just about everything, especially when rival scientists Crick and Watson (played by Christian Coulson and Allen Tedder in the best ways possible) take possession of Rosalind's work and use it for their own intentions.

Director David Auburn has staged this play as though there was no audience and so the actors use their playing space as though it was a real place and not a stage. Oddly,



David Adkins, Brandon Dial, Rebecca Brooksher;
Photo: Emma K. Rothenberg-Ware

hours of theater. That's not a bad thing and the final twenty minutes are very moving and emotional. Adkins and Brooksher leave you with an unexpected emotional attachment to Maurice and Rosalind, to their errors in judgement, their mistakes in science and their unintentional personal losses. It is hard, very hard indeed, not to leave the theater loving them both in spite of everything that occurred before the long finale.

+ 06/17/2023 +

Photograph 51 plays on the Larry Vaber Stage at the Unicorn Theatre, 6 East Street (enter from Route 7), Stockbridge, MA through July 1. For information and tickets call the box office at 413-997-4444 or go to BerkshireTheatreGroup.com.