

Something Rotten
The Court Theatre
Directed by Benjamin Kilby-Henson
November 25 - January 27

Something Rotten? No, something joyous. The Court Theatre has done it again – it's a comedy tonight - for the holiday season. The summer production is always eagerly awaited and this one is, once again, a winner.

Something Rotten is a Broadway hit show, here in its Southern Hemisphere premier. The title hints at its theme – it's Shakespeare – but not as we know it. This show, based in Shakespeare's time is funny, energetic, irreverent, full of jokes, wit and wordplay, cunning disguises, slapstick comedy, and big scale musical numbers.

The Court production is a triumph. On entering the auditorium, with the curtains referencing the Globe hangings, it is clear we are in for a treat. The opening number, *Welcome to the Renaissance*, reveals Dan William's Elizabethan London in broad brushstrokes of black and white, props, many created in two dimensions, similarly treated. Against this background Tina Hutchinson Thomas, the costume designer has been able to run riot with colour, creating a spectacular visual effect.

Something Rotten tells of the rivalry between the Bottom brothers, Nick and Nigel, and Shakespeare, formerly a member of Nick's troupe of actors. The Bard is in his stride, the rockstar writer, lauding it over London, courting the idolisation of fans at every turn. The Bottom brothers cannot compete, debts are mounting and failure is imminent unless they can come up with something new. A soothsayer foresees the answer – an entirely new genre – wait for it – a musical.

This magic scenario allows for a merry mix up of Shakespearean and musical theatre tropes and these are milked to the max. We delight in the Shakespearean characters, hear many of his most famous lines, all mixed up with similar references to the world of musical theatre.

The cast is quite clearly enjoying themselves, the energy on stage enormous. The ensemble is large and vibrant. They are everywhere, all the time, in many roles, providing the background which fleshes out the storyline. Comedy is king, the timing is impeccable and the song and dance numbers create infectious delight.

The principal actors bring huge vitality to their roles. Jonathan Martin as Nick Bottom exemplifies the idea of hope against the odds while Cameron Douglas contrasts superbly as his sweet, naïve younger brother. Monique Clementson as Bea, Nick's longsuffering wife revels in her thoroughly contemporary attitude while Bianca Paine epitomises an ardent arts enthusiast as Portia, Nigel's love interest. It is great to see Paul Barrett return to the Court as the mendacious soothsayer, Thomas Nostradamus, nephew of the great man. As Shakespeare, Matu Ngaropo struts across the stage, adulation his due, never fretting about the dishonesty of his actions. With his impeccable sense of timing, sometimes virile and sometimes camp, Ngaropo ensures that the audience too fall under his spell.

As we would expect, Richard Marrett directs a top-class band. My one regret is that given the size of the cast and set it was not possible to see them in action.

Something Rotten held its audience enraptured on the opening night, the standing ovation spontaneous. This feelgood musical, brilliantly directed and produced is a must-see, magical theatre experience. Book your tickets – it will surely sell out.