


The Pink List

 Review by Alexander Williams ★ 4

Stories about the Second World War, the horrors of Nazi Germany and the Allied victory are well told across our cultural landscape. Less common is the shocking treatment of the gay men, persecuted as perverts under the Nazi regime, who remained criminals in the eyes of the law after Hitler's defeat and suffered continued surveillance and prosecution in the shadow of others' liberation.

A harrowing, necessary story captured in a moving script

The Pink List, a new hour-long musical written and performed by Michael Trauffer, drags this horrifying history into the light. It tells the tale of Karl Hellwig, a composite fictional character whose life story is constructed from the real experiences of gay men in Germany during and following the war. The story is framed within the structure of a 1957 court trial in which Hellwig's presence on the Nazi's Pink List, still in use despite the year, near guarantees a guilty verdict. From his defendant's chair he leads us through key moments in his life.

The excellent free programme summarizes this forgotten and neglected history excellently, which has the unfortunate consequence of making the opening of the show feel rather repetitive and expositional. But as we grow to know Hellwig and care about his individual struggle, the narrative drive accelerates.

The songs are not especially memorable but they serve the story brilliantly, pushing forward the plot to such an extent that the majority of them do not have clear endings but rather break off in interruptions as Hellwig notices something or someone and stops singing to begin his next action. Although this strategy adds to the songs' lack of memorability, it also adds to their metaphorical impact. It creates an ominous, uncomfortable sense that whenever Hellwig is finally able to take some control of his life and be genuinely expressive, external factors once again conspire to crush him.



Aside from a vital reassessment of historical context, Trauffer the writer has produced a story equally full of sadness, desperation, heart and hope. The script resonates with promise. I didn't feel Trauffer the performer quite lived up to that promise. His characterization of Hellwig is sweet but largely ineffectual and he doesn't portray in his voice or movement the depth and range of feeling demonstrated and demanded by his words. Nonetheless, there is an authenticity in his performance, I think in part related by his accent, in part by his proximity to the material, and in part by his genuine reverence for history.

The set is sparse and the theatricality of the piece is cleverly enhanced by inventive use of voice recordings, crisp backing tracks performed by Sarah Morrison and really thoughtful costume changes.

Overall a harrowing, necessary story captured in a moving script but Trauffer's multifaceted role as creator, book writer, composer and lyricist means his performance would perhaps be enhanced by more external direction.



Alexander Williams

Alexander Williams is a writer, singer, director and actor. He hosts the What's On Watford podcast, is resident reviewer for the Watford Fringe and hosts the popular Dial Up open mic events.

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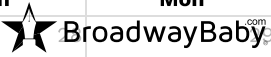


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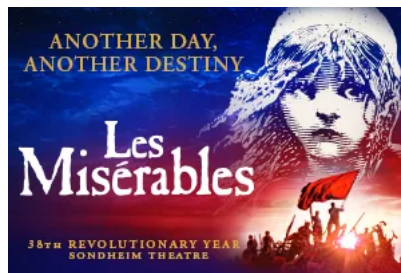
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The Blurb:

1957 West Germany. The battle against the Nazis ended 12 years ago, but the war against injustice rages on. Karl, a gay concentration camp survivor, stands trial for the "crime" of loving another man. While most laws have been denazified, the Nazi-era law persecuting homosexuals remains in force, making men like Karl perpetual offenders rather than recognised victims. From the creators of the critically acclaimed "Fabulett 1933", "The Pink List" a one-person musical inspired by the untold stories of gay men in postwar Germany, takes its name from the lists created by the Nazis to track and target gay men - lists that were still used by the German police in post-war years. This thought-provoking work sheds light on the struggle for recognition in a society that refused to acknowledge the suffering endured by the persecuted.



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