

# Things I know to be True by Andrew Bovell

## Five Stars – no doubt.

Review by Alex Wood

This is a devised piece scripted by Andrew Bovell, charting the life of the Price family. Originally set in Australia this has been revised a little to set it in Oxford where the family live. It's a great play. The text of the script is so dense, so clever, so thought-provoking that to describe it as a family drama would be a huge understatement. On first night it certainly rang empathetic bells for the audience throughout the play – chuckles, whispered comments, little exclamations of agreement with various characters, one or two gasps.

Bob and Fran are dad and mum. Dad has taken early retirement and the garden is his domain. He kind of likes the routine but the seasons come round more often now and that can get monotonous. He loves his wife and grown-up children and tries to do his best for them, even if his attempts at this are sometimes ham-fisted and clumsy to the point of being comic. Fran, his wife, is very different. Still working as a nurse her blunt reflection that if Bob got dementia she would not want to look after him, having spent her life caring for others, represents her more practical outlook on life, as does the existence of a (surprisingly) large 'going away' fund, garnered through her working years and unbeknownst to Bob.

Both characters have at their heart disappointment. Andrew Whiffin as a man who is unsure that he has done everything he can, for himself and his family, making up for it by offering advice and the occasional lift to anyone (whether they need it or not). Janice Lake as a woman who feels the real and heavy weight of the family on her shoulders. She offers the hard advice that people don't really want to hear... It's a mother's job to make her children cry-one way or another... so they understand pain. At the same time so concerned about refreshing her relationship with Bob, before it's too late for both of them.

Fine performances in this partnership.

Youngest child is Rosie who sets an impressive and touching start to the evening in a stunning monologue at the play's opening. Her gap year has been a disappointment – she quickly realises that visiting capital cities might not be all she imagined. But then she meets a young man who steals her heart and, within a few days most everything else she has with her. The next few months are spent wondering what she should do next and being part of various dramas unfolding. Imogen Tredwell portrays Rosie, seeking a direction in life and watching her family's dramas as they unfold, to perfection.

Pip, the oldest child, is played by Almira Brion. Unhappily married and seeking to avoid the sort of marriage her parents have she takes a way out by moving to Canada (Fran disapproves of this, suspecting an affair) only revealing to her mother the true reason for moving a letter she sends after she gets there. Almira gets her character just right – hard, resentful and needing to escape before she turns into her mother.

Ben and Mark are the brothers.

Will Healey buzzes as Ben, dropping by now and then, often too busy to stop. The difference between these generations is nicely demonstrated by him turning up with a brand new, expensive, car. Bob, far from being proud of his businessman son, is furious – at Ben's age he was scrimping to

buy a second-hand car. The scene when Ben, frantic with fear, comes crashing onto the house with news that he has been 'skimming' accounts – the source of his young wealth – was done so well by all involved. If not well-rehearsed and effectively done such a scene can turn into a messy debacle, but this was excellent. The contrast between the two Bens was too – well done Will!

Finally, at the start of the play Mark announces that he is leaving his wife but drops the real bombshell when he tells his parents and Rosie that he wants to transition to be a woman. I loved the way that Bovell describes the feeling that Mark is going on a huge, scary adventure...leaving his old self to become someone totally new. And the exchange of watches between Rosie and Mark is a priceless moment in the play. Lovely empathy and understanding from Zac Lacey-Rousou.

All simply set in the Price's garden which works well with the use of some mime and a few stage blocks.

For me this is without doubt the best amateur production I have seen. Wonderful acting, no use of a prompt, crystal-clear diction and so very sharp!

As for direction, I am so envious of the cast! Director Chrissie Garrett must have set so many challenges for them and worked them so hard in the best of ways. And with a great result.

*'The only thing we know for certain to be true is that seasons change and life does go on'* - Rosie Price