The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole was written 35 years ago. It portrays the struggles of its intellectual anti-hero adolescent, as he tries to deal with the many trials of the teenage world. They are the same struggles of today’s teenagers, the opposite sex, parents, and an uncaring world. Bruiser have revived their 2005 production in celebration of their 20 years of theatre work.

The Set:

Before the play begins the stage is set with a huge framing rectangular archway. The sides and top of this archway are quite narrow, about one foot or 30 cms wide ,and are patterned with a grid, as though it’s graph paper. The words of all the months are written on this arch with an accompanying symbolic sketch. January has a paw print, February a pierced heart, for example, while a birthday cake with candles is drawn alongside April with the words ‘to me’ scrawled beside it, and August has a crab. Within the centre of this grid and closer to the audience is a book, twice the height of a man and about four times his width. The book is also patterned with grids and written on it in script are the words, the ‘Secret Diary of’ then in block capitals ‘Adrian Mole’ and in script again, ‘Aged 13 ¾’ The book is split down the centre but both sides are closed together at the start of the play.

When the show starts the book opens at this crack to reveal two substantial struts, the folded ends of the book and inside them, going ¾ of the way up, are two frames, one on each side which are filled in with curtains. These inner frames are set about the width of two people apart, and are joined by a cross-piece, 4/5 of the way up. The set can be a school cloak room and there is a row of coat pegs at just about shoulder height running across the outer struts and the inner frames. They can also be the interior of various houses. There is an upper level and from time to time members of the cast appear looking out from above the coat hanger rail. The floor is composed of squares of what look like old fashioned linoleum.

There are a number of very versatile pieces of furniture. There are four traditional school desks and two large, basic, rough benches. In combination these become a kitchen table with benches either side, a car, a train, a sun lounger and barbeque and a zimmer frame, as well as making up a school classroom. There is also a padded office desk on casters which at one point

becomes a wheelchair.

The Cast

When the cast are not performing individual roles they also form a sort of chorus to the action, accompanying it with their singing. As the chorus they all wear school uniform. The men have grey trousers, white shirts, dark green blazers with badges and green and red striped ties, while the women wear grey skirts with their blazers, white shirts and ties. At one point they become a really cool gang, with black leather jackets over their grey trousers and at another, as a band they wear peaked, military style caps and at another time they all appear sporting white angels’ wings on their shoulders.

Adrian, played by Adam Dougal, is a short, slight figure with short, neat, dark hair, a pale, thin face and large spectacles. For most of the show he wears his school uniform, which is like the chorus uniform but he wears a grey knitted regulation pullover on top of his white shirt. At one time he appears in a warm, woolly dressing gown in bold brown and beige checks. At another time he wears a cosy duffle coat.

The part of Nigel is taken by Keith Lynch. He is short, stocky and slighty overweight, with brown hair, a square face, deep-set eyes and a neatly trimmed beard. He wears a variety of baseball type tops in loud colours with vibrant patterns. One has purple sleeves, a white front and a bright orange design on the back. Another is in pink, white and black with lime green reveres on the jacket. He also wears a baseball cap back to front on his head and sometimes rings the changes with a red beret and a torn t shirt. Keith also plays the parts of Bert and Mr. Lucas. As Bert he wears a tatty string vest with braces holding up his grey trousers. He wears a brown trilby on his head and walks with a shuffle, using a chair as a zimmer frame later in the play and has a tartan rug over his knees when he sits. As Mr Lucas he wears a beige jacket over his grey trousers.

Mrs Mole, or Pauline to us, is played by Orla Mullan who also takes the part of Queenie. As Pauline she is a plump, voluptuous figure with a round face, bright blue eyes, dark curly hair and pink cheeks. She wears a revealing red top with a bright pink and red jacket over and later a flowery dressing gown. Sometimes she wears a white shirt open over her red top and another time she wears a black bomber jacket with sequins on the shoulders. As Queenie she is resplendent in a bright red, loose coat which fastens with one button coat with a sixties-style pink turban hat decorated with flowers adorning her head. She uses the chair on castors as a wheelchair and has a multi-coloured knitted blanket over her knees.

Mr Mole, called George, is played by Gerard McCabe. He has a square face, regular features with blue eyes, dark short hair and a thin mouth. He is of medium height, stocky and slightly overweight. He first appears in a navy blue cardigan trimmed with white and with a red and green patterned tie. He wears a green and black checked dressing gown on Christmas Day and he also wears a loud check shirt over the grey trousers. At one point he appears only in a bath-hat, his naked chest showing from behind the folded-back book. As Barry Kent he is a cool bully in his black leather zipped bomber jacket with fringed sleeves and he also plays the nursing home matron in a nurse’s cap and apron. Then there is the headmaster. He is represented by an academic gown and mortar board on a tall stick, rising high above the actors, which Gerard manipulates.

Colette Lennon takes a number of different parts. She is Pandora, Grandma, Mrs Lucas and Doreen Slater. She is a tall, slender figure with a pretty, pale, oval face, high cheekbones, dark eyes, a neat nose and a full mouth. She has an abundance of long hair which is sometimes tied back in a pony tail with a large blue bow. As Pandora she wears a white short-sleeved aertex shirt and a very short, navy, pleated P.E skirt and white ankle socks with black patent shoes. A red prefect’s badge adorns her blazer. As Grandma she sports a grey coat, a flowery headscarf, with hair in rollers beneath the scarf, and a small maroon patent leather handbag. As Mrs Lucas her height is emphasised in a pair of denim dungarees with an aertex shirt beneath. Her hair is hidden by a knitted bobble hat in stripes of dark and pale purple and white, with a large purple pom-pom. Her final part is Doreen, a splendid figure in a tan and beige leopard print loose robe, with long Oriental style robes trimmed with black fringes and cinched in at the waist with a black belt. Her hair is an mass of abundant lush auburn curls.

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole is a Bruiser production, directed by Lisa May. Matthew Reeves is the musical director and Stuart Marshall the set designer. James McFettridge designed the lighting and Carla Barrow the costumes.