

## FULL REVIEW

### Mort

#### Canterbury Repertory Theatre

Elmwood Auditorium

May 15<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>

Reviewed by Phoebe Biddle  
for Backstage Christchurch -  
Theatre Reviews

“Death comes to us all. When he came to Mort, he offered him a job.” It’s a fabulously concise blurb, letting the viewer know what is in store without giving too much away. Mort, a youth, is taken in by Death to be his apprentice. Death has grown tired of being Death and wants to find someone who could take over for him. Of course, it all goes horribly wrong when Mort doesn’t kill who he needs to and does kill people he shouldn’t. It’s fabulous, funny, witty, and very Terry Pratchett.

The first 20 minutes or so of the Repertory Theatre production of Mort I was sat waiting for... something. It didn’t hit how I wanted. As a frequenter of Discworld I knew the characters already and it’s better for myself that I did, because it didn’t feel like we got as good an introduction to the characters and the world as I would have liked. If you have never read a Pratchett book you might have struggled at times. The plot itself was a little hard to follow, too, though this is down to the writer of the play, not the cast - you can only work with what you’ve got! So much of it was fabulously simplistic, but some of it could have done with some embellishing. The love story between Mort and Ysabell for example - it felt like it came out of nowhere. Again, not the fault of the cast who were, in my opinion,

exceptional.

I can’t fault the costuming or the set design. Perfect! The way that Mort’s outfit got gradually more and more embellished as the play went on was fantastic. It showed time passing and character growth in such a simple but effective way. The props as well, so simple but perfect. Skulls and spiders and books. Could have done with a cat or two - if you know, you know! The lighting was also phenomenal. Using flashing sequences during the killing and battle scenes is genius. It made it spooky, haunting, and added a touch of realism which can be hard to do in theatre.

I have to commend the entire cast for their performances. I appreciated the authenticity of the English accents used in the play, and the consistency of them throughout was amazing. Such tiny inflections as Jack Mould’s pronunciation of Death (“deaf”) to not only show his youth, but where he comes from, was just brilliant. It truly felt like these characters stepped right out of the pages of Pratchett and onto the stage. The characterisation was impeccable. Jack Mould as Mort and Lance McBride as Death - just superb. Their acting against each other was never to outshine the other but enhance them. It could have been hard on stage with a character such as Death who, let’s be honest, draws the attention of the crowd, but Mould held his own. I don’t think Mort could have been better cast! And McBride - the small nuances in his movements such as cocking his head or hunching his shoulders. He didn’t have a lot to work with, and I can’t imagine the

skull mask was very comfortable, but he gave us a personable and expressive performance anyway - truly remarkable. The only thing I found fault with was that some of Death’s lines weren’t extremely clear. The mask, mixed with the clever echo attached to his voice, made his lines a bit mumbled at times. A bit of fiddling with the sound effects would sort this, and it didn’t detract from the performance too badly!

Russell Haigh as Albert, Death’s servant, and Mark Darbyshire as Cutwell, a wizard, were also just perfect. Likeable, funny, believable, and very well dressed. I enjoyed their performances greatly. And a shoutout to the ladies of the play - Emma McBride as Ysabell, Death’s daughter, and Bernadette Richardson as Princess Keli, a well, a dead princess. Truly fabulous. I didn’t like Princess Keli much, but we weren’t really supposed to! So very well done on Richardson’s part!

There’s so much good I could say about this production. My tiny grievances on sound and plot make no dent to the enjoyable experience I had watching it. I had my reviewer goggles on, so it might even be that no one else would have even noticed these things! I fully encourage anyone who can get along to a show to do so. Performing until May 25<sup>th</sup>, see it now before it’s gone!