

Gaiman's tale brought to life

Hannah O'Flanagan experiences the hard work LUTG firsthand in the production *Neverwhere*

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY THEATRE Group's production of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, an original adaptation, was an enigma to many. Director Peter Slaney had written the script himself, and just as many people entered the Nuffield Theatre not knowing what to expect, as there were people who were avid fans of both the original BBC production, and the subsequent novelisation. The effort the entirety of the cast and crew had put into this production was evident from the moment one walked into the auditorium and saw the set that had been constructed from hand by all involved.

What started with a tense opening as the Lady Door ran panting across the stage, closely followed by assassins Mr's Croup and Vandemar, sometimes struggled to keep up with the intensity and excitement the first scene provided. Whilst the direction throughout the play was excellent, and there were charming pieces of detail within each scene. Elaborate effects produced by lighting and sound were, on the whole, extremely effective; the eerie and menacing Knights-bridge sequence and Richard Mayhew's ordeal were two of the most successful examples. However, it sometimes fell slightly short of the mark; and whilst the darkness of the stage did provide a dingy atmosphere (especially when in London Below) some of the action took place a little too far outside of the light and the audience missed the finer details of it. This was similarly awkward when it came to the split level staging, as at



Alex Wimbush in his portrayal of the character Richard Mayhew (Photo: Fred Thomas)

times the audience would be distracted by set up going on in different parts of the stage, but this is a risk many directors and productions have to face. There were a few technical errors throughout, but the cast and crew sailed through these with a professional attitude that was to all of their credit.

The cast as a whole were very good; for many, this was their first Theatre Group production, or indeed, their first substantial role. Yet again, it seemed that some of the larger characters could have done with an extra week or so of

polishing in rehearsals to fully make them confident in their performance; but on the time scale they were unfortunately given, each of the main parts did exceptionally well. Alex Skitt's Marquis de Carabas in particular was a well rounded and likeable character, portraying his 'likeable rogue' and 'man about town' traits well. Many of the smaller characters were just as finely tuned as the major roles, and produced some of the most memorable moments of the production; notable examples include Jess Burre's Abbot, Katherine Meyrick's

Old Bailey, Steffen Zschaler's Earl and Paul Hughes' Mr Stockton. There was also an ingenious piece of casting and directing for the beast sequence.

All in all, *Neverwhere* was an enthusiastic and ambitious production, although it sometimes seemed a little disjointed and suffered from unfortunately limited rehearsal time. However, whilst it possibly reached a little too far with the time it was given, it managed to pull off a successful, entertaining and imaginative piece of theatre.