

Leanne Rubinstein
Review

This March, the Theatre and Dance program at the University of Colorado Boulder put on a production of “Spring Awakening,” a rock musical adapted by Steven Sater from an 1891 German play of the same name by Frank Wedekind. The story is intended as cynicism toward sexually oppressive culture, telling a dramatized tale of teenagers discovering their own sexuality. CU’s production stressed importance on the youthfulness of the characters in this show, and the “edginess” they brought to the rock-style music in both tone and choreography, as well as the spot-on costuming and carefree set design, ensured the fun, rebellious energy was unable to be missed.

The message of the piece contains a kind of warning of the dangers of a lack of sex education, following teens Wendla Bergmann, Melchior Gabor and Moritz Stiefel as they uncover new and mysterious desires that ultimately lead them to disaster. This play remains relevant today as many cultures continue to value abstinence-only sex education, or none at all.

Much of the arch of these characters exhibit their rapid growth through curiosity, temptation and action. It asks for a rise and fall, laying the most focus on the events occurring before and after the “action,” in this case being the intercourse occurring between Melchior and Wendla. In Brendan Lynch’s portrayal of Moritz, I saw growth clearly. I watched him believably descend into madness and personal torture, guiding the audience with understanding toward his final act of suicide.

The characters of Melchior and Wendla, played by Grant Bowman and Rita DiSibio, serve to play utter opposites, brought together by pure desire: Melchior believes himself to be well educated and mature in emotional and physical love, though he is doomed to discover he may not understand as well as he thinks; Wendla, however, initially is denied any knowledge of the subject, and is shoved too soon into a harsh reality.

Bowman strutted about the stage with energy and confidence, and exhibited strong desire using both his physicality and his dialogue. He fiercely clarified his objective to find himself in a culture that insisted he stop trying (through his writing and pursuit of Wendla), as well as to push others in the same direction. This allowed for a sharp contrast near the end of the show when he is wrought with grief, confusion and hopelessness in discovering the death of Wendla and realizing the weight of his actions that caused the demise of those closest to him.

DiSibio did a good job of portraying the adolescence and innocence of Wendla, and she was clear in her frustration toward her mother and her curiosities toward maturity. One aspect I was missing, however, was the motivation behind the “action” that surpassed mere curiosity. I didn’t observe DiSibio matching Bowman’s expression of desire; it felt almost like the opposite, as if she had to be pressured into it. I would’ve liked to see more tension in a way that breaks through the safety of simply playing into the innocence aspect of the character, displaying this purity as a smaller obstacle rather than an almost complete roadblock. I wanted to see her threaten to lose her innocence completely, if only in that one moment.

The sex scene specifically was one that pulled me out of the story. Having never seen nor researched the show before, I was under the impression that Melchior was pursuing Wendla while she attempted to turn him away. After it passed, it had taken me a couple moments to realize what had happened.

Otherwise, this production was fun and expressive, and genuinely enthralling to watch on the stage. The cast was filled with very talented musicians and performers, and I felt it to be a creative and fast-paced experience that had me both tapping my feet and wiping my tears.