

Walnut Creek Journal

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CURTAIN CALLS: SALLY HOGARTY

Crew makes hit of 'Secret Garden'

THE WILLOWS THEATRE in Concord opened a spectacular production of "The Secret Garden" this past weekend with Peter Crompton's impressive set becoming one of the story's enchanting characters.

Swirling on three turntables, with scenery also gliding in from the wings and popping up from the back, the multilevel set created a magical atmosphere for Marsha Norman's intriguing story. Based on Frances Hodgson Burnett's beloved children's classic with music by Lucy Simon (Carly's younger sister), "The Secret Garden" weaves its tale of renewal as a young orphan girl, Mary Lennox, restores life to her deceased Aunt Lily's garden as well as to her grieving Uncle Archibald and his son, Colin.

Andrew Holtz directs with a subtle hand as he moves the story along at a brisk pace, with Dan Uroff providing the clever choreography and Rob Anderson the dazzling lighting. Costumer Christine Crook has outdone herself with beautiful period outfits and such whimsical designs as the female members of the ensemble becoming part of the garden in their hoop skirts and head pieces covered in vines. But, the story relies heavily on strong vocals, and this cast does not disappoint. Elizabeth Hunter (Lily) has a marvelous operatic soprano with Hannah Rose Kornfeld (who alternates with Katy Corbus as Mary) exhibiting a mature voice well beyond her 12 years. Russ Lorensen (Archibald) gives a nuanced portrayal of the grieving husband and father with Kristin Stokes (Martha) adding her vibrant energy to the mix.

"The Secret Garden" continues through March 25. Call 925-798-1300.