

SO MUCH TO TELL YOU

Presented by: Young People's Theatre

Venue: Young People's Theatre, Hamilton (phone 4961 4895)

Season: Ends March 12

MARINA, the central character in *So Much to Tell You*, is a 14-year-old girl who has been so scarred physically and mentally as a result of a violent argument between her parents that she has retreated into silence. But when she is enrolled in a boarding school in the hope that the company of other girls will get her talking again, Marina's observations of her seven dormitory mates make her realise that she is not the only one with a troubled family.

John Marsden's stage adaptation of his novel is a sympathetic look at the lives of Marina and her roommates, with a lot of warm comedy in their musings about boys, pop concerts and other events, and the school's prefects and teachers.

It is also a complex work to stage. There are two Marinas on stage: the damaged silent girl everyone sees and the inner Marina who voices the comments about her feelings and the people in her life in a diary.

Marina's father, jailed for the action that scarred her, is also visible throughout the story, sitting and walking around a stark prison cell on a raised level behind the boarding school setting with its bright bedclothes and recurrent untidiness.

The diarist Marina talks a lot about wanting to visit her father and in some sequences she is seen looking at him in his cell. She is clearly as much in his mind as he is in hers.

Director Emily Taylor and her team bring all these elements together smoothly, with Taylor adding elements – background songs by herself and Mathew Taylor which reinforce the emotional flow in the dormitory world and brief film inserts that show Marina in happier days – that enrich the telling.

The production has two casts but my experience of Young People's Theatre shows gives me confidence that the actors I didn't see will be as good as the opening night players. Joanna Bevan (doubling with Ellen McNeil) was a moving silent Marina, her expressions saying much as she sat or lay on her bed watching and listening to the other girls. Grace Worthington (Alexandra Rigby) brought out the real Marina, moving energetically around the dormitory while commenting about her world.

The dormitory mates were a richly diverse group.

Bianka Lee (Gabrielle Cornett), as the caustic Sophie, revealed the girl's fragile side in a scene where, thinking herself alone in the dormitory and unaware that Marina is watching from a doorway, she rails at her separated parents, throws another girl's happy family photos on the floor, then looks with increasing anguish at herself in the mirrors that are behind each bed. It is emotionally powerful.

Bob Price (Brian Wark) handles the role of the ever-present, brooding father well, and the other actors make their characters enjoyably familiar, with an occasional jolt that makes the audience realise that Marina isn't the only one with so much to tell.

Ken Longworth

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