

**Review Years 10 – 12: Theatre Production**

**King Kong, world premiere at the Regent Theatre, Melbourne**

**When King Kong first emerges from the dim mists of Skull Island, roaring and beating his chest, he has the audience gaping in awe.**

The six-metre Kong is the runaway star of this new musical and the most fully developed character on stage because of his expressive, almost human face, imposing physicality, majesty and grace. It is heartbreaking to witness such a magnificent - albeit mechanical - creature chained, tranquillised then exhibited as a freak show.

Thanks to his creators (designer, Sonny Tilders) and operators (puppetry director, Peter Wilson), Kong lives, breathes and communicates; he roars with unfettered rage, complains, grieves, is jealous, wretched, combative, childish or protective. Even his on-stage and off-stage operators get rousing applause for their feats of athletic puppetry and animatronic operation.

This big-budget, global premiere is an eye-popping spectacle designed to appeal to 21st century audiences that demand relentless action, colour and movement in their entertainment.

The cast is superlative and Esther Hannaford is perfectly beguiling and quirky as Ann Darrow, the reluctant heroine, evolving from a gauche, country gal into an assertive woman risking her life to save Kong.

Ann and Kong's rapport is central to this show's success and director, Daniel Kramer, effectively shapes their connection into a genuinely poignant, heartfelt and credible relationship.

Hannaford's versatile voice is pretty and warm singing the mellow, memorable Full Moon Lullaby to soothe the injured Kong, and the sweet, striking ballad, What's It Gonna Take, but she is hilariously feisty leading the sassy chorus of Hollywood babes in Special FX.

Chris Ryan is an ideal foil for Hannaford as Jack Driscoll, the dashing sailor who romances her in the nostalgic, Fred and Ginger-style Fox Trot, and his pure tenor has passion and trepidation singing In the Face of Forever, about Jack's fear of falling.

Adam Lyon is bold and funny as rapacious Hollywood director, Carl Denham, and his voice is impressive in the rock anthem, Colossus.

Queenie Van De Zandt is thrilling singing Rise, a soaring tune that

Descriptive opening sentence creates imagery for the reader, hooking them into the performance without yet seeing it  
Detail about the main character and plot using positive emotive language to convey point of view about the show

References to the people behind the scenes and audience reaction to the show reinforcing the positive response

Suitable audience for the show outlined

Discussion of the lead actor and her performance using adjectives with positive connotations to persuade the reader

Reference to specific songs which are a highlight of the show in order to gain the reader's interest in seeing it

Reference to more minor cast members and their performances and sharing highlights of the show

charts Kong's climb up the Empire State.

The many elaborate chorus numbers (choreography, John O'Connell; acrobatics, Gavin Robins) including Hunting Season, a Busby Berkeley routine, are vibrant and entertaining.

However, songs must advance story and illuminate characters and, although Marius De Vries' compositions are rousing and diverse, and individual songs by contemporary artists have a distinctive flavour, the repertoire lacks a consistent voice and unified vision.

The story (Craig Lucas) gallops at a giddy pace for 45 minutes until Kong appears, with one huge chorus scene chasing another, and lacklustre dialogue does not enhance characters and relationships.

The bold, modern design (Peter England), complex laser lighting (Peter Mumford) and projections (Frieder Weiss) create an intricate landscape but, with so much stage action and overwhelming visual stimulus, some scenes are overwrought, busy and dizzying.

While the production is a triumph of state-of-the-art technology, only time and public reaction will determine whether King Kong the musical can achieve the cult status of the classic 1933 movie upon which it is based.

**Star rating:** 4/5

**What:** King Kong, Book by Craig Lucas, Original music by Marius De Vries; other songs by 3D from Massive Attack, Guy Garvey, Sarah McLachlan, Justice, The Avalanches; additional lyrics by Michael Mitnick, Richard Thomas; presented by Global Creatures

**Where and When:** Regent Theatre, Melbourne, no closing date.

Use of 'however' indicates a shift in tone to more critical and disappointed regarding the elements being discussed in these paragraphs, the adjectives being used carry negative connotations here

A final thought leaving it up to the audience to see it for themselves and decide on the play's worth

Rating from the reviewer

Credits and details of where to see the show

- From: *Kate Herbert, Herald Sun*, June 15, 2013