In the minds of most people, lynching, with all its connotations of hideous violence, is inextricably and exclusively associated with the murder of African Americans by white supremacists in the USA.

*Parade*, however, focuses on a victim who was abducted and hanged by anti-Semitic vigilantes in 1915 in the southern state of Georgia.

The story is, briefly, this: a girl – Mary Phagan – who works in a pencil factory managed by Leo Frank, is found murdered on the premises. The completely innocent Frank is charged with her murder and is found guilty and sentenced to death. Eventually, the governor of Georgia commutes the sentence to life imprisonment. Not long afterwards, while at a prison farm, Frank is abducted and lynched. None of the lynching party, which incredibly, included lawyers, a court prosecutor and the son of a senator, was ever held accountable. Decades after this miscarriage of justice, Frank was posthumously pardoned in the 1980s.

I had wondered whether so dark and tragic a story was suitable for treatment as a music theatre piece. But any reservations I might have had about this evaporated only moments into the piece. By even the most severe of critical standards, this production of *Parade* was riveting stuff. Near-perfectly paced, its two-hour-long duration flew by in a production worthy of high praise.

In this multi-faceted offering, the youthful players in a large cast came up trumps again and again. The pivotal role of Leo Frank, who was 31 years old when he met his terrible death, was played as if to the manner born by Brendan Hawke, who captured the character’s stoic, rather prissy and edgy personality nuances to the nth degree. And Laura Page as Lucille was no less convincing as the wife who refuses to cut and run but stands loyally by her man. Lucille, incidentally, was scion of a prominent Jewish family which decades earlier had founded the first synagogue in Atlanta.

Whether coincidentally or by design, Hawke and Page are strikingly similar in looks to the characters they play.

Rather oddly, the role of Frank’s do-nothing lawyer Luther Rosser was played, very competently, by a woman Naomi Livingston. But what was the point, if any, being made? Nearly all the large cast sang multiple roles.

It says much for the skill which Uhry and Brown brought to their creation of *Parade* that despite the trappings usually associated with the genre, the dancing and singing in no way robs the story of its tragic darkness. Bobbing, weaving and twirling, the dancers brought Bernie Bernard’s choreography to exciting, pulsing life. Drew Weston, as reporter Britt Craig, was a particularly impressive presence.

David King presided splendidly over events, conducting a big instrumental ensemble positioned at the rear of the stage. Throughout, singing was of high standard as were Tony Gordon’s lighting and Jess Tran’s imaginative set designs. Cale Watts’ costumes did much to establish a sense of era. Crispin Taylor’s directorial touch was everywhere evident not least in consistently meaningful deployment of an unusually large cast.