Who would have imagined Charlotte Bronte’s much-loved, densely rich 1847 classic with the ubiquitous, manically laughing “mad woman in the attic” would reincarnate as a musical?

First appearing on New York’s Great White Way in 2000, it was nominated for five Tony Awards. With music and lyrics by Paul Gordon and John Caird, the novel is transported to stage through sumptuous music, haunting melodic refrains and clever lyrics.

This week, Jane Eyre: The Musical, premieres in Australia, courtesy of a talented graduating WA Academy of Performing Arts cast.

It is brilliantly directed by Leith Taylor, who has returned to Perth after a stint establishing an international acting course at the La Salle-SIA College of Arts in Singapore. Enjoying a long association with WAAPA, she comments: “It is exhilarating to be working with such a talented, passionate and hard-working group.”

Featuring a cast of 40, and written in a style reminiscent of Les Miserables and Miss Saigon, the emotional, mystical, haunting music perfectly captures the complex, introspective nature of the novel’s highly strong, vividly imaginative heroine who defies the feminine stereotypes of her day by being plain, orphaned and assertive.

Her experience as a female is of oppression, bullying, confinement, powerlessness and economic dependence. Her painful journey is from lonely, rejected child to strong, loving, sexually expressive woman.

In the musical the young Jane and the adult Jane often appear together on stage, interweaving their stories and duets to underpin Jane’s long passage to maturity, wisdom and forgiveness.

The musical expertly echoes the “other worldly” atmosphere of the text with a theatrical blending of romance, mystery and fairytale magic.

The opening scenes reflect Jane’s blighted inner world, her longings to escape “over mountains, over oceans” embedded in the musical refrains. Through narrative and chorus work, the ensemble mirror Jane’s idiosyncratic, powerfully imaginative personal perspectives.

The vivid lighting, impressive audiovisuals and constant changes in musical tone and tempo take the audience on a rich voyage through various settings that mirror Jane’s emotional and psychological states — the oppressive Gateshead and Lowood, the brooding, Gothic Thornfield Hall with its eerie, dark secret, the sumptuous garden with its chestnut tree, and the burning ruins of Thornfield Hall where Jane finally finds love and fulfilment with Rochester.

The set is brilliantly simple and versatile. A return to the “virgin garden” symbolised by the setting of Ferndean at the end, and constantly reiterated in the songs, would have given a greater sense of unity and credibility to a performance pervaded with a sense of hope and faith.

This is a stylish performance. Liz Styles as Jane and Matthew McFarlane as Rochester expertly handled their demanding roles with beautifully intonated singing voices, while the eccentric Mrs Fairfax (played by Eliza Anderson) brought comic relief to the bleakness of Thornfield Hall in her cosy, cheerful tea-drinking rituals and upbeat songs.

One can only applaud this talented cast in offering a stage experience that is not to be missed — whether you have read the novel or not. The final uplifting duet between Jane and Rochester left hardly a dry eye in the audience.