



Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Limehouse
Date : 31/03/2023
Venue : Ascension Hall
Report by : Mike Smith

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Thank you for your kind invitation to review your production of Limehouse, and for the hospitality and kind attentiveness of your Front of House volunteers – it was much appreciated.

Limehouse– another of those ambitious productions that we have come to expect from Beaufort Players. So before I comment on the aspects of performance, I must congratulate the creative Production Team.

Tom Parker in his role as Director. Taking up the reigns for the first time – describes himself in the programme as an anxiety-induced mess! He may have been a mess – but the production certainly was not! Well done Tom for being brave enough to tackle something so different for your maiden voyage into directing.

No production runs smoothly without the dedication of the rest of the Production Team, and it was very evident that the team in place for this show worked well together. The set was well designed and well – constructed by Ana, Thomas and the Beaufort Builders. Props were excellent and were expertly moved around by the cast during the play

Sound for the show was clear, just the odd telephone and doorbell to ring, all on cue – thanks to Roger.

Lighting throughout was extremely well managed and effective, under the watchful eyes of Scarlett and Pete.

Wardrobe department, in the capable hands of Krystyna, provided costumes that were all in keeping with the period. Giving her time to take up the vital role as prompt.

All seamlessly managed by Stage Manager Eileen.

It's January 1981 – at a special Labour party conference, power seemed to have shifted away from MPs towards the unions and there are rumours of a split.

Limehouse is a fictionalised account of the formation of the Social Democratic Party, when the “Gang of Four” – Bill Rogers, Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins and David Owen gathered together in the Owen's house at Limehouse to discuss the possibility of forming a new political movement.

What starts as a thought-experiment involving four lightly shaded caricatures – and Deborah Owen the literary agent married to David Owen – evolves into a compelling political debate about the heart and soul of the British left.

I congratulate Floriane Courbard-Nicolle, in her first production with the Players, for being brave enough to take on the role of Deborah. She in fact is turned into a key player: she manages to shape her husbands plans, makes sure the wine is right, smooths fraying tempers and serves a delicious pasta bake! Her benign manipulations made a welcome tone-change to the rumblings and grumblings of the four politicians. I must admit I struggled at times with the accent – as with all the characters a very wordy role well played.

Martin Roe gave a sterling performance as David Owen – showing a man driven by equal parts political passion and personal ambition. His long speeches were delivered clearly, with passion and a fair amount of animation. Ranting about current leadership and yearning to reach out to an imaginary constituency of middle-class Liberals. He certainly achieved his aim in capturing the fighting spirit of David Owen – even if he didn't resemble the man himself!

Rory Hardisty – the anxious bumbler with backache. He revealed real conviction squirreled away under both sarcasm and timidity. A role played with real confidence. His unexpected poignant speech About leaving the Labour party – for what? was quite moving.

Emily Bates – welcome to Beaufort Players. A baptism of fire taking on the role of Shirley Williams! A pragmatic, forthright role – a woman who witheringly shuns anything that smack of vanity. Head slightly tilted, gaze completely straight and fearless. Presenting us with a will-she won't-she character. Someone who obviously enjoyed the pasta bake! Well done.

I must say that Jonathan Simmons gave a brilliant study in elderly deliberation! Mightily comic as he sniffs the cork from the wine bottle, looks for someone to take his coat, and then waffles on with wry remarks about Brussel's. But then, very movingly, delivers - with stirring conviction - a childhood episode. A very creditable performance which I much enjoyed.

Joana Coelho – definitely born to interview! A very nice cameo role, Watch out Laura Kuenssberg – you have a real rival!

The author takes a subject and demonstrates pinpoint precision throughout, adding touches of emotion and humour. We are presented with a vision of a will-they-won't -they divided group, with much sniping. One minute they are completely failing to agree on even a first sentence of a declaration, the next they've bashed out the whole thing in a single off-the-cuff conversation.

The cast of this production were a confident and well-oiled group. Between them presenting a play that was both enjoyable and thought provoking. Smart, slick and well-acted. Steeped in political history (which I must say many of us well remember) with a refreshing lack of grandeur.

Yet another Beaufort Players success.

A nod to the pasta bakes makers – it looked really good!!!

Mike Smith – NODA London District 2