



Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Comical Allsorts: 'Speakeasy' and 'Last Tango in Little Grimley'
Date : 29, 30 & 31 March
Venue : The Church of the Ascension Hall, Beaufort Road, Ealing W5 3EB
Report by : Zena Wigram (District 2)

Report

Your NODA review is supposed to offer constructive criticism to help improve the standard of amateur theatre. You made that very hard to do – this was a super evening of well-rehearsed, well-directed comedy.

'Speakeasy', written & directed by **Jane Quill**, produced by **Rachel Thorn**, opened the evening. It was a very good choice: the laughs came thick and fast, with some thought-provoking ideas in between them. The only element that wasn't utterly believable was Mary's revelations of her sexual assault – the clichés seemed to come in a tidy sequence just a little too neatly. Apart from that, it was excellently written and Jane is undoubtedly an extremely experienced director. The actors – a talented ensemble - cued in fast and pointed their one-liners well; I was particularly impressed with the concentration that allowed them to keep speaking and acting without any reaction to the howls of audience laughter some of their lines provoked.

Craig McCrindle was excellent, leading most of the scenes as Gary, the therapist who needed a bit of help himself. His problems were mostly caused by his girlfriend Candy, played by **Sarah Pettitt** full of splendidly shrill argument, and seeming completely unaware of Keith's reactions to her (splendid) figure. It's not easy to portray a believable drunk, still less to get your lines out clearly while doing so, and **Tania Hunt** (Rachel) did so superbly. I was impressed by **Paul Miglentsis**, as Michael, who portrayed a not-particularly-sympathetic character very well, and Jonathan / Bettina (**Russell Gillman**); they both rose to the challenges the script offered. I think Russell might have practiced in his high heels just a little more, to make his demonstration of walking in a skirt a little smoother, but this is a minor quibble. **Matt Tylanakis**, as Keith, was a gem – beautifully watchable throughout. His splutter of coffee when Bettina revealed her 'issue' was fabulous. **Vicky Prior**, as Mary, was the least experienced cast member; she looked suitably dowdy and will grow as an actor as she learns not to 'show' upset but rather to **be** upset.

Make-up by **Ben Boyle** and **Vicky Prior**, and costumes by **Jane Quill** and **Rachel Thorn** (who presumably had a lot of washing between performances after poor Keith's mishaps with coffee and 'non-alcoholic wine') were all most appropriate, and the cast managed lightning-fast costume changes between scenes to the accompaniment of carefully selected music. My only query was why Bettina – divorced – wore a wedding band, while Rachel – unhappily married – did not. The set, designed by **Jane Quill** (is there no end to her talents?) was absolutely appropriate village hall, and even the bows were funny. The play was a treat from start to end.

It might have been better to start the evening with 'Last Tango in Little Grimley', as it was a little unfair to have it follow such a comic tour de force. Director **Roger Dishley** and producer **Diana Dishley** gave us a tight, well-rehearsed play, but it was harder to feel sympathy for the characters, and it therefore lacked a little appeal. **Ted Hunter**, as the morose Bernard, was excellent, with perfect timing as well as exactly the right physical presence. **Gemma Breakell**, as the dippy Joyce, was also lovely. Her 'bath' acting was a little more accomplished than we might have expected (though I was confused by her choice of song – why not something from 'Oklahoma!' or 'Seven Brides'?), but her

'anger' with flailing arms, was perfect. Margaret, **June Burgess**, was suitably ascerbic, reacting perfectly throughout, especially to all the comments about her 'assets'. **Alan Robinson**, as Gordon, coped with the largest and most difficult part, but he could have given his charmless character a little more light and shade. Adding some cajoling and a little uncertainty would have made him more likeable. If he had been less consistently camp and self-congratulatory, we would have felt more for him in his frustrations with the challenging personalities he had to deal with, and we would have laughed in more sympathy when, for instance, Bernard's hammering and then lighting stopped the rehearsal.

Carefully selected music by **Roger Dishley** showed us the passage of time between scenes, while the cast changed their costumes using the costume rail upstage – a clever idea, but I have never been to a committee meeting or read-through which included a rail of costumes: a hamper or set of plastic boxes might have felt more authentic. Lighting for both plays, by **Pete Balls** and **Thomas Cobb**, was perfect – ie completely appropriate and unobtrusive. It's a thankless job: if you do it well, no-one notices you were there!

The informative programme (better laid-out than many I've seen on far glossier paper) by **Russell Gillman** and **Esther Holt** included highly entertaining actors' biogs, and photos from 'Dungerella' - which I'm sorry I missed. I wish you luck with 'A Murderous Lot' in July - and hope you'll invite me to see it.

Zena Wigram
District 2