



Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Ladies' Day
Date : 29 November - 1 December 2012
Venue : The Church of the Ascension Hall, Beaufort Road, Ealing W5 3EB
Report by : Zena Wigram (District 2)

Report

Thank you for inviting me to enjoy this well-crafted play performed by an excellent cast, and for the friendly welcome from **Roger** and **Diane Dishley** and **Elaine O'Sullivan**. (I'm glad I gave Elaine something to do, as the cast didn't appear to need her in her continuity role!)

From the moment we walked into the hall, it was clear that the evening was to be different: the artificial grass 'course' (was that sourced by producer **Kate Martin**?) was very clever. The programme by **Russell Gillman** and **Esther Holt** was clean and clear, with amusing cast biogs.

The four ladies of the title were a true ensemble, working together to support one another and the play. They gave us cleanly defined characters with individual personalities, clear dialogue with consistent accents, and gradually revealed their vulnerabilities throughout the play.

Gemma Robinson was a delightfully naïve Linda, growing in self-confidence as the play went on - my only suggestion is that she could have placed her hat a little further back on her head to allow us to see her expressive face better.

Tania Hunt, as Jan, gave an assured and solid performance, and revealed her husband's desertion beautifully; though I felt she sometimes tended to hunch over a trifle, rather than standing straight. This might have been deliberate characterisation, of course!

June Burgess, as Shelley, was excellent, using both her voice and her body to allow us gradually to see the uncertainties below her brash exterior.

Jane Quill, as Pearl (on stage rather than writing, directing and designing sets this time: is there no end to her talents?) was lovely, with her calm motherliness hiding the worry about her lover.

Matt Tylianakis as Joe, the factory supervisor, gave a warm performance, with clear dialogue, though he tended to move when he spoke, and stand slightly fixedly still when he didn't have lines. It may help to think about a continuous narrative in your head: what is your character thinking at each point in the play, whether you're speaking or not?

As Fred the tout, **Roger Dishley** was suitably sleazy - a most enjoyable performance.

Jim McCormack, played by **Ted Hunter**, was great, and his tic-tac demonstration was really impressive. He used his clipboard well, though, of all of them, his character should have known the correct pronunciation of 'Ascot': "Ass-k't" (not "Ass-cott"). Some of his dialogue could have been a trifle faster - not the speaking but the cutting in: the old saying is "cue in fast; speak slowly", but the way he gradually got more slimy was a delight.

Alan Robinson was spot on in his cameo as pathetic drunken Kevin, in a scene that helped us to learn more about the ladies' characters.

Patrick, played by **Séin Ó Muineacháin**, was a little taller than I'd have expected a jockey to be (though much of his dialogue was cleverly set on a stool to minimise his height), but it was quickly obvious why he was cast: his timing and delivery were absolutely excellent.

Robert Allan, as Barry, was super - I'd never have believed this was his first part. His dancing with Pearl was particularly touching (I was so glad it wasn't rushed, but we had enough time to appreciate the moment properly).

Stage Manager **Chris Burns** and his construction crew (**Chris Burns, Thomas Cobb** and **Roger Dishley**) had risen nobly to Diana's multi-space challenge, and the minimalist set combined with sound and lighting to give us each scene beautifully. Really excellent miming by the cast meant **Vicky Prior** had few props to source, but of those that were required, the only ones that weren't totally appropriate were the very tiny sandwiches (they reminded me of *Salad Days* where I had to eat and then sing and dance immediately thereafter - so I know why they were tiny!). Despite my sympathy, I felt that a few 'doorsteps' would have looked more the part, and could then have been quietly returned to the (perfect) Union flag cool-bag. Costumes, shoes and hats by cast members were all absolutely perfect: Patrick's silks and hat by **Krystyna Kobiak** deserved a round of applause of their own. Perhaps dressing the crew as bar staff would have made their slick moving of the chairs even more impressive?

Sound by (the multi-talented) **Roger Dishley** was clever - the background noise subtly supported the placing of each scene in the factory or at the racecourse, but never overwhelmingly so. The interval music, too, compiled by **Martin Perrott**, was cleverly chosen to point the scenes. Lighting by **Pete Balls** was also excellent - it was never intrusive, and we could always see just what we were supposed to see.

Director **Diana Dishley** had bravely chosen to set much of the play in the round, which made it really clear to us where we were in each scene, and gave a lovely sense of place. She had encouraged excellent performances from all of her well-cast characters, and the different places for the different scenes worked extremely well. My only slight criticism is that the scenes set in the middle of the 'course' could have been more static: they moved around just a little too much. The space (and the excellent projection by the characters) meant that we could hear all the words wherever people were, and the choreography got a bit distracting at times, for example Pearl and Barry's dialogue, where stillness would have been more effective than the constant shuffling about. I would also have liked the opportunity to applaud the four leading ladies separately at the end - and separating them out might have made the bows a little less cramped. But these are mere quibbles - this was a delightful play, extremely well done, of the high standard I have come to expect from Beaufort Players. I look forward to your next show, 'The Memory of Water'.

Zena Wigram
District 2