



Society : Beaufort Players
Production : The Memory of Water
Date : 19 April 2013
Venue : The Church of the Ascension Hall, Beaufort Road, Ealing W5 3EB
Report by : Zena Wigram (District 2)

Report

Thank you for your invitation to this excellent evening: a great choice of play, beautifully produced. I was so wrapped up in enjoying the production (at times laughing out loud) that I didn't write many notes, so forgive me if this report is shorter than usual.

The warmth of the welcome from **Elaine O'Sullivan** and **Roger Dishley** was not diluted by my traffic-induced last-minute arrival – thank you. The programme, by **Russell Gillman** and **Esther Holt**, was interesting and clear, though I feel it's a little risky to tell the audience that they're about to see 'rich comedy', or describe a play as 'incredibly funny' and 'a cathartic release', and I suggest it's safer not to take the chance of someone's objecting that they didn't gain a 'deep understanding of the emotions which haunt and inspire us all'. A little editing of Director **Craig McCrindle**'s fairly lengthy introduction would have allowed a slightly larger font, to help those audience members, including me, who have started to find reading small print in dim light a bit tricky!

The first thing to impress me was the astonishingly good set. It was a 'simple' box, but the attention to detail was tremendous – I really do applaud **Thomas Cobb** (set construction), **Alan Robinson** (props and stage manager), and their team who had designed and filled it so well. The realistic crack along the wall, the piles of pictures and 'stuff', the mouldy wallpaper, the wardrobe (big enough and well supported enough for Caroline to disappear inside it), dresser and the big double bed: it was all superb. As well as looking great, the set was also fabulously strong, proved not only by the old-fashioned radiator (full size) hung on the wall below the window (with its appropriate net and working faded green curtains), but by a not-especially-small man whose entrance involved clambering in over the windowsill. I was also impressed by a door sturdy enough for cast members to slam it without any wobbling in evidence. Even the wings had been carefully thought through, so the two men manoeuvering the coffin out did so realistically while we heard every word of the dialogue.

Craig McCrindle's directing debut was a triumph. It's never clear where the balance of a successful play lies between a good director encouraging great performances from the actors, and a talented set of actors being given space by the director to do their best, but that doesn't really matter when, as here, the whole team (including all the backstage supporters) worked together to give a really excellent production. All the way through, the play had a lovely pace, with changes of tempo beautifully done to interpret the cleverly written mix of sadness and humour, and lovely offstage work to keep the action moving forward.

The three sisters were tremendous – really extraordinary performances, and very believable. They allowed us to laugh at the humour without losing sight of their humanity as the relationships were revealed to us.

I feel that Catherine, played by **Jackie Oates**, might perhaps have been the hardest role. Being 'the nutty one' could easily have been a caricature, and the part hadn't, I felt, been written with as rounded a characterisation as the other sisters, but Jackie kept it real and maintained her energy to the end of every line and every scene. How much **Lisa Gillman** (accent coach) had helped was unclear, because there was absolutely no hint of any accent other than home counties. And Craig had no need

to be concerned: whoever took Catherine's reefer 'smoked' it beautifully, and the fact that it didn't actually smoke was really not an issue in the slightest.

Kate Martin (Teresa) started out as a fairly predictable martyred eldest sister and then suddenly launched into a marvellous breathless flow of invective. I doubt if it was easy to learn, but she made it seamless. She didn't let being drunk spoil her enunciation, so we heard every word of it, and I was impressed by her very realistic crying (not easy to do), though I felt she could have taken a tiny bit more time over her recovery.

Esther Holt's Mary was the third and perhaps most interesting sister. The different layers of her character peeled off gradually and she developed from the woman who had everything into the saddest person on stage in a performance that was tremendously watchable. Her grief was particularly well done – very moving – and her quiet speech right at the end was intensely thought-provoking.

As their dead mother, Vi, **Jane Quill** moved with assurance around 'her' bedroom, and stirred up Mary with amusing mischievousness. However, she seemed to have her arms folded almost all the time – I wasn't sure whether she felt uncomfortable in the halter-neck dress or whether she wasn't sure what to do with her hands when she wasn't doing the gestures which Mary had to duplicate. (I don't remember feeling this in her lovely performance in 'Ladies' Day', so it surprised me.)

This was definitely a play for the women, so Mike (**Matt Tylianakis**) and Frank (**Martin Perrott**) had their work cut out! Mike did very well to make us sympathise with a character written as a selfish womaniser. I felt his and Mary's embraces were just a trifle rushed at times – if this was a long-standing affair, I think they'd have been more comfortable with kissing and caressing, and it would have been easier for him to be confused by her refusal to go any further. He did a lovely comic turn in his embarrassing towel scene (although I couldn't quite work out why the script didn't send him back to get dressed in the bathroom). His not answering her question at the end was beautifully understated. Frank's performance improved as his character developed. At first he seemed to be shifting around a great deal and it tended to be distracting. It's OK to be still and quiet and just concentrate on what the others are saying; you don't always have to 'act' by doing things. Clever direction did give him things to do, and he relaxed later, as the complexities of his relationship with Teresa were revealed.

Lighting, by **Pete Balls**, was good, as usual, cleverly changing where needed to clarify that Vi was a ghost. **Russell Gillman's** sound was appropriate and unobtrusive. It appeared that Continuity **June Burgess** had nothing whatever to do for the entire evening.

Costumes by **Elaine O'Sullivan** and **Krystyna Kobiak** were great. The different period dresses for the sisters to try worked very well, and their funeral outfits were a good contrast. The duplicate green dresses were a lovely colour, and worked very well when Mary confronted her mother. The only tiny question (I know I'm being very picky here) was raised by Mary's jeans, which were a little low-slung for 1990 – but I can well believe she wasn't able to get any with a higher waist in the shops now!

While I'm trying to find suggestions for improvement (which is really very hard), I noticed that the envelopes for the letters of condolence didn't have any writing nor stamps on them – had they all been dropped by hand through the letterbox? And I think the cast could have taken the bows with more confidence: they didn't seem to enjoy the (well-earned) applause as much as they deserved. The bows are a way to let the audience enjoy expressing their thanks to you for a lovely evening, which is indeed what we were doing.

I do look forward to your production of 'Tempting Fête' (what a great title!) in July.

Zena Wigram
District 2