



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Beaufort Players  
Production : Santa Slayed  
Date : 9 December 2017  
Venue : Church of the Ascension Hall, Ealing  
Report by : Zena Wigram, district 2

[Show report](#)

Beaufort Players is fortunate enough to have a wealth of talent available. This festive whodunnit was another home-grown production which demonstrated your teamwork and multiple abilities, not least a capacity for substantial hard work!

### General

Santa Slayed was an amusing piece of nonsense from the fertile brain of Thom Cobb, set in a not-quite-Grace-Brothers-store, 'Beauforts'. The dinner and performance format worked extremely well for the audience interaction - and I hope swelled the coffers appropriately.

You might have considered taking a little more time to explain the all the subtleties of Thom's complex plot at the end. He had thought through various details, not all of which were included in Stef's explanation, which seemed a shame, because they were very clever; perhaps one or two of the other characters might have helped out by way of 'confessions' of their actions and the reasons to wind things up.

### Players

Mary Hill worked very hard as Stef Upperlip, keeping the store running and managing the audience just as efficiently, in an admirably consistent performance. Full marks in particular for the way she managed the excuses for moving the body and not calling the police over either of the crimes!

Yet again Gemma Robinson stepped into her role at practically the last minute – and yet again, made a solid success of it. Elf's naivety was touching and she has a gift for looking natural on stage, whatever her character, and making every move realistic and meaningful.

Elaine O'Sullivan had great fun as the ghost of Nicky, beautifully dressed and made-up, and with super facial expressions, particularly during the ouija board scene. I'd never have believed this was her first theatrical outing for Rebekah Vance (Crystal Gazer), who was very thoroughly in character throughout. For her next performance, she may want to try to be more still on stage, moving only when there's a specific reason. She and Elaine, as well as sound operator Roger Dishley, had clearly put in lots of rehearsal time for the sequence when Elaine 'took over': it was very amusing, and congratulations to all of you.

Maria O'Beirne was splendidly grumpy as June Lover, suitably prickly about how she was addressed. Peter Coles made a most convincing west country gardener of Doug Apitt, with super energy. And full

marks to Chris Burns for making Adam Anlostum shifty while [spoiler alert!] seeming far too meek to be the ultimate villain.

Everyone did great work staying in character and giving believable answers to the audience questioning on stage. Just do try not to cross your legs on stage: it's seldom attractive and the eyelines can make it quite uncomfortable for the audience.

There was a bit of a tendency for people to stand (sometimes shifting from foot to foot) in a neatly spaced line or half circle across the front of the stage facing forward. It did help with voice projection and made the words wonderfully clear, but it looks more natural if you can try to group into clumps, or half-turn sideways, and 'cheat' your dialogue out front. And bear in mind that if the person next to you has an important speech, it's helpful if you can shift very slightly downstage of them and look fully at them to help them to look natural while speaking out front.

### **Direction**

Director Krystyna Kobiak (with 'little helpers' April Parker and Gemma Robinson) had encouraged everyone to work hard on clear enunciation and projection, and it was beautifully easy to keep up with all the twists of Thom's plot. At the same time, the performers kept the pace up, and there were only a few places where the dialogue was a little rushed. There was, however, a tendency to come onstage, stand and talk to one another, and then go off again; perhaps additional activities such as decorating the tree or the front of the stage, or carrying parcels or shoppers' receipts on or off during the dialogue could have allowed for more natural reasons to enter, chat, and then exit.

The initial discovery and subsequent removal of Nicky's dead body, supposedly hidden from the 'shoppers' in the audience, was a trifle forced. Stef might have taken advantage of the table seating to make her initial speech from the side of the hall – standing on a box if necessary. That would have helped with the pretence that the flurry of activity around Nicky's dead body was 'to hide it' from our view. And perhaps some of the discovery of the body might have been done 'before the play started'?

I admired the very clever setting of 'Santa's grotto' for the scene with the 'children': and I was most impressed with the excellent clarity from Elf and Santa – and the offstage contributor - during that scene, managing to get the words across clearly despite talking sideways into the wings.

The hoe could have been a bit more centrally 'thrust' – it almost looked as if it was in Santa's side, which was less effective than if it had been right through the torso. And it was remarkably clean and shiny when it was withdrawn! Some of these little touches were probably missing because this fun evening was put together so remarkably quickly.

### **Stage management, lighting, sound, props, prompt**

The fabulous Beaufort technical team had once again created a most attractive set, designed by Ana Bretes and Thom Cobb, including a splendid fully lit Christmas tree. Ana Bretes was also kept busy as stage manager and props - presumably raiding the Christmas decorations of family and friends for all the dressing on the attractive set, and doing a great deal of work on wrapping a series of differently sized Secret Santa gifts. It is helpful to ensure there's liquid in flasks and cups: miming a drink is very difficult to make convincing.

Prompt April Parker came swiftly the rescue when required. Lighting by Jane Quill and Pete Balls, and sound by Roger Dishley, were appropriate and well-timed during the performance. It might have been possible to use them a little more to start again after the interval, when Crystal had quite a challenge to get the audience to settle into the play again. It was very clever to have each person's Christmas song for his or her bow. However, the bows would have been neater with just a little more rehearsal – do bear in mind they're the last thing the audience sees, so it's always worth making sure they're as slick as the rest of your production.

### **Costumes**

As well as directing, Krystyna Kobiak managed costumes and box office, and worked with Russell Gillman on the programme – quite a set of achievements! Costumes were all appropriate to the characters, with store badges on the staff; and Nicky's white outfit was most effective, matching her dead body (also created by Krystyna) remarkably well.

### **Front of house**

The front of house team, led by Elaine Cobb, worked even harder than usual with a great deal of catering and waiting work, as well as sorting out tickets and the handsome programme by Russell Gillman and Krystyna Kobiak.

I'm unable to eat after 7.30pm, but the comments from those around me made it clear that the lasagne was excellent. Our table enjoyed much lively discussion about the thief and the murderer, enjoying the clues with which Thom had liberally sprinkled the script.

All the character names were perfect for pantomime season; the timing of the evening was spot on; the show was interspersed with lines from various Christmas songs, and there was a barrel full of red herrings: other than the embarrassment of your NODA rep at winning the prize (!), what more could anyone want?

Congratulations to you all for a most enjoyable evening, and I look forward to enjoying 'Don't Dress for Dinner' in March.

Zena Wigram  
District 2