



Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Blue Stockings
Date : April 9th, 2022
Venue : Church of Ascension Hall
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It was a pleasure to have visited with Beaufort Players, on this occasion, and enjoy their production of Blue Stockings. Mike Smith, your District 2 NODA Representative, unfortunately tested positive for Covid recently which prompted an emergency call and my visit here.

Blue Stockings is a very challenging, thought-provoking, yet highly entertaining drama by Jessica Swale. It deals with the fight for women’s education and more specifically the right to receive a degree. The four pioneering women in this play are housed at Girton College, part of Cambridge University, and quickly realise both resentment, and prejudice, in their struggle for both acceptance and equality.

Melissa Riedel is to be congratulated as Director and for assembling a very strong cast and ultimately delivering such believable characters. This demanding play, including significant amounts of scientific language to learn, must have taken countless hours of rehearsal and time for the cast to master. Whilst the original script does include multiple scenes, I felt that the sheer volume of changes did slow the production. Without wishing to cut any of the dialogue, maybe there could have been some amalgamation here? Overall, this was an excellent production from a cast who’d benefited from clear direction and strong character development.

The four principal ladies were all exceptionally strong actresses and provided the play with brave, intelligent and witty characters to admire. Their struggle towards achieving a degree, together with the sense of oppression, and alienation, in such a male-dominated institution as Cambridge, was evident from the start. Excellent stage presence, and control, from four very talented actors.

Julia Josephson was superb in her absorbing portrayal of Tess Moffat bringing not only compassion and wit, but also passion and anger, all of which were delivered beautifully delivered. Unexpectedly finding love, and losing sight of her reason to actually be at Cambridge, Julia added much emotion to her character whilst gaining real empathy from the audience. Emma O’Toole gave a delightful performance as the cautious, sensible yet encouraging Celia Willbond. Selina Patankar- Owens added further humour in an excellent performance as the well-travelled, and relatively carefree, Carolyn Addison. Rachael Taylor provided the tragic element in this quartet as Maeve Sullivan. Dedicated to making the most of her opportunity, Maeve was unexpectedly called back home, on the death of her mother, to care for her young siblings.

The male students were equally strong actors whose believable characters were clear for all to see. It was a delight to watch these undergraduates from Trinity College as they interacted with each other and the with the Girton ladies. Each had moments of humour and demonstrated both excellent stage presence and confidence throughout the play.

Harry Jefferies was excellent as Lloyd, the aggressive, rude, often smirking and ever-so entitled bully. This was another strong piece of character acting that included some genuine moments of humour to enjoy. Thomas Cobb showed great versatility as Holmes, Lloyd's sidekick. This quiet man simply wanted to get along and 'not make waves'. Mujtaba Walji added plenty of humour as Edwards, a bit of a clown and a young man eager to 'fit in' and be accepted by his peers. It was the quiet disapproval of Lloyd's crass insults and violence that was most pleasing to watch. Jamie Stungo gave a strong performance as Ralph, one of the lads when it came to sessions in the bar, but who was susceptible to the charms of the attractive and intelligent Tess.

Tom Parker gave a sensitive and kindly performance as Will Bennett, Tess's childhood friend and an undergraduate from Kings College. Secretly protective of her, and later smitten with her, Will was ultimately converted to the cause of female education. The cameo role of Billy, Maeve's brother, was the complete opposite and provided a real sense of injustice as he unexpectedly arriving to take his sister home, and thus crush Maeve's desire to ultimately become a teacher. .

Eileen Laird gave a commanding performance Mrs Welsh, the pioneering Mistress at Girton who strove to uphold standards whilst propelling Girton forward on its path to equal recognition. Eileen expressed all the nuances of Mrs Welsh's struggles and dilemmas, as she upheld discipline whilst impressing upon her girls the attitude and behaviour necessary to succeed.

Mary Hill provided another strong female role model as Miss Blake, the inspiring science lecturer who was able to command attention, and instil that love of inquiry and learning from the moment she first addressed the young ladies.

Peter Coles gave a very convincing performance as Dr Maudsley, the renowned psychiatrist who did not believe that women should be educated. This bastion of male academic chauvinism clearly made his feelings known during a particularly vitriolic monologue on female hysteria.

Tony Mann (Mr. Banks/Librarian), Rachel Lee McKenzie (Minnie/Lady) and Ann Marques (Miss Bott/Mrs Lindley) gave good performances in their respective cameo roles.

Ana Bretes filled the role of Stage Manager admirably and ensured the numerous scene changes were handled well by a very efficient crew.

Krystyna Kobiak managed Costumes and these certainly were of a very high standard. The ladies wore delightful late Victorian gowns whilst the men were also very finely dressed. Regardless of their character, everyone 'looked the part'. The costumes were very appropriate for the setting and definitely enhanced the audience's enjoyment of Blue Stockings.

Pete Balls and Roger Dishley managed Lighting/Sound well and with no negative issues of note.

Thomas Cobb is to be congratulated for delivering a programme that was full of information for the audience to enjoy reading. There were some terrific photographs of rehearsals together with great cast and production team biographies. It was also pleasing to see the programme so well supported by advertisers and, of course, the prominent NODA reference.

Congratulations to Beaufort players, and especially those involved with Blue Stockings, for an excellent evening's entertainment. It was a pleasure to have provided emergency cover for this production and I'd be delighted to return again if ever needed...

Des Wilby
Regional Representative
NODA London District 3