

Society : Beaufort Players
Production : An Evening in Little Grimley
Date : Thursday 11th July 2024
Venue : Church of the Ascension Hall, Ealing W5 3EB
District : Region 2

© NODA CIO. All rights reserved

Show Report

General

This evening of two one-act plays was the first time I had come across the comedies of David Tristram, and I couldn't have asked for a better introduction. Witty, with some clever one-liners and a sprinkling of double-entendres, they hold the audience's attention easily as it waits in anticipation for the next piece of comedy. The society handled these two plays with ease, ensuring that we had a very enjoyable evening's entertainment.

Directors

This was a joint effort from Isobella Hatwell, who was directed "Lockdown in Little Grimley", and Emma O'Toole, who directed "Murder in Little Grimley". Both directors, although this being only the second directorial outing with the Beaufort Players for each of them, proved themselves very well-equipped to handle the pace that the comedies needed. They had obviously collaborated sympathetically to produce a seamless evening of two well-balanced halves. Casting each play separately gave more members of the society a chance to show their prowess on stage. As these plays were new to me, there wasn't the confusion of two people playing the same character in either half. Good use was made of the limited stage entrances, with another from the audience.

Players

Both of these plays have small casts, and it is imperative that the players work as an ensemble, which both sets did very well. There was no cue-trouble, which made for the fast-paced delivery and quick pick-up of lines from each other. Each character was distinct and well thought-out and played to the fullest.

"Lockdown"

Craig Serventy – Gordon

You wouldn't have to go far to find a "Gordon" in every AmDram society, and Craig had this character nailed down: the long-suffering producer, having to deal with unruly adults who are more like children. Sometimes martinet, sometimes bombast, sometimes downright stropky, this was played with keen observation and a deft hand with the comedy.

Kate Martin – Margaret

Margaret is the Queen Bee of the society, and Kate brought out every acerbic and brittle comment with relish: very much the Grande Dame!

Amy Maclaine – Bernie

This part is usually played by a man, but the change worked very well: the character is meant to be slightly boorish when played by a man, but Amy played it with more subtlety and her characterisation worked very well. There was no feeling that the casting change was misplaced, and she played the more risqué lines with a light touch.

Daniela Donato – Joyce

As a foil to the others, Joyce could end up being overshadowed by the larger-than-life characters she has to compete with, but Daniela held her own, with just the right amount of nervous energy and whimsy.

"Murder"

Thomas Cobb – Gordon

The physical differences between the two "Gordons" meant that Thom came over as a distinct character in his portrayal of the part. Being taller, he could literally look down on the others with an air of condescension when needed. He gave as good as he got, in his verbal fencing with the others, especially with Margaret.

Lainy Cobb – Margaret

Lainy got right under the skin of the character of Margaret, certainly being sharp-tongued and not suffering fools gladly. Every barb, every jibe was aimed with precision and spot-on timing.

Grace Smithson – Bernie

Again, as this part was played by the opposite sex, there was an opportunity for Grace to get more from the dialogue: in the 'caring/concerned' scene between Bernie and Gordon, she brought a subtle break from the comedy, but without losing the general fun of the piece.

Gemma Robinson – Joyce

There are nuances in playing Joyce, from being pedantic to serious, to nervous and to twitty, and Gemma caught all of these in her playing of the part, with just the right amount of absurdity.

Mujtaba Walji – Sam

The Detective is an added character to the usual four that we have met before, and it could be difficult to match the four characters that we have already met, but Mujtaba made his presence known the moment he first stepped on the stage. A character with a twist, he managed to upset the feuding equilibrium of the other four, and certainly made Gordon feel guilty!

Costumes, set, props

The costumes were well suited to the plays, as was the set (designed by Ana Bretes), which was simple, but effective, with the changes happening seamlessly. Good use was made of props, where they were needed. There was good use of the stage area, with nothing coming across as cramped.

Lighting/sound/prompt

These two plays are "one set wonders" and so any change of time will be done through lighting and covering music, both of which were slickly cued by Pete Balls and Jane Quill, and Roger Dishley, respectively. The sound balance was just right, although, because of the acoustic of the venue, the dialogue came over as a bit 'boomy' at times. The dialogue was, for the most part, clear (just be wary of trying to keep up the pace within the dialogue by running sentences too fast). The prompt was Krystyna Kobiak, but I don't think she had anything to do on the night I attended, judging by the pace and flow of the dialogue!

Poster/programme

These were designed by Thom Cobb and were bright and colourful. The programme contained all the production information needed, as well as news from the society (not all of it good: re the fire!). There was information about the society and how to join, as well as an explanation of what NODA is. A review of the previous production was published, together with colourful photographs, and also an advert for their next, which will be a pantomime. I wonder if the poster/programme cover is one you could use as a theme, the next time you perform a "Little Grimley" play?

Front of House

I was made to feel most welcome by your front of house staff, who all looked very smart in their matching sweatshirts – very corporate! Thank you for looking after me so well.

Amateur theatre playing AmDram can be a difficult task: putting over characters we all have met in a funny but gentle way is no mean feat. Beaufort players pulled it off with aplomb! This was an excellent evening's entertainment – thank you for inviting me.

Tom Rainbow.