

Society : Beaufort Players  
Production : Abigail's Party  
Date : 20 march 2026  
Venue : Ascension Hall Ealing  
District : 2

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[Show Report](#)

Thank you for your warm welcome on my arrival at Ascension Hall and for looking after me so well. It was a delight to meet you and also to see some familiar faces

### General

Abigail's Party is set right at the heart of the mid-1970s psychedelic Britain. It was really pleasing to see how well Beaufort Player embraced the style of the time. Their set was eye catching indeed and the wallpaper (which they managed to source) was in perfect accord for the era – and I noted, matched up perfectly on the joins ! The furniture and props had been well sourced for the time period – was it Ercol furniture ? There was even a rubber plant which were so popular at that time. Even the reference to the Estee Lauder perfume was spot on. Clearly **Ana Bretes** had done her research well and together with **Craig Serventy & Beaufort Builders** delivered the time-capsule that unfolded before us.

### Director

Emma O'Toole directed this drama very well indeed. Set in one space with a cast of 5 it requires ingenuity to bring movement and interest to what could become a static place. In this Emma really succeeded and she managed to convey a sense of community 'out there' with neighbours close by and brought to the production pace and interest throughout. She brought out the very best of her cast. Well done Emma an excellent job.

### Characters

We have such a complex set of characters but this is not obvious immediately, it is cleverly drawn out throughout the drama, as the layers of the 'onion' are peeled away to reveal the tensions in the relationships.

**Beverley** (played by Gemma Robinson) opens the play, dancing into her living room in her psychedelic dress to *Love to Love you Baby*. This sets the scene and she is obviously someone who embraces the good times of the 1970s. Beverley, by sheer force of personality, is set to dominate the proceedings that unfold. It is only as the drama progresses that we begin to see the self-centred shallowness of the character being revealed which is at a mismatch with her husband's deeper thoughts and feelings. Gemma gave an excellent performance as Beverley as she brought not only energy and dominance to the role, but also a great deal of fun which endeared one to her. She cleverly combined this with the beginnings of contempt for her husband and the manner in which their lives and interests were diverging. Portraying disintegrating relationships had the potential to be somewhat dismal, but it never was as Gemma combined a great deal of humour into this role, which also reinforced the character's self-centred attitude. A joy to watch.

**Laurence** (played by Alan Robinson) enters the living room in a suit with the wide lapels much in fashion in the 1970s and wide trousers that could have one taking off in a high wind. He is an estate

agent and has aspirations which, as the drama unfolds, one can see his wife does not share. Laurence wants more from life than just fun and frivolity – he wants intelligent conversation too and this he does not get from Beverley. He is clearly there to assist Beverley to set up for a drinks and nibbles party for the neighbours – with the emphasis on ‘drinks’. It becomes obvious from their interaction that Beverley is the more dominant party in the relationship and Laurence, while not in the least being meek, endeavours to cooperate, in the interests of harmony. Laurence is a complex character, his aspirations become apparent as we move through the play, his desire to improve himself, his desire for intelligent meeting of minds, his interest in art is starkly contrasted to Beverley’s lack of interest in joining with Laurence in these pursuits. Laurence’s growing interest in Susan, a more cultured character, is inevitable. Alan inhabited his character with utter conviction and gave a first class delivery of this complex character, not only through dialogue but also through body language. Congratulations Alan, your performance was a delight.

The guests, **Angela** (Amy Maclaine) and **Tony** (Toni Giugliano) arrive and what an interesting couple they are. They have just moved into the close and is one of the reasons why Beverley and Laurence are having a drinks party to get to know them.

Angela has clearly defined her character at the opposite end of the spectrum to that of Beverley and this contrast works so well and is applauded. Angela is a solid person, somewhat boring, who works as a nurse, who cannot stop talking and revealing secrets that her husband wishes she had kept quiet. She clearly demonstrates she has a focus on home rather than on fun, but Amy manages to convey a combination of a shallow character, that has little empathy for those around her, but something more interesting inhabiting somewhere inside if only it could be released. Angela is quietly dominating in the relationship, always answering for Tony and hardly letting him get a word in edgeways. Interestingly Tony, although irritated, is compliant with this. The interruptions by Angela were so well timed and come over as perfectly natural. Amy delivered this contrasting style of character to that of Beverley’s, excellently. Amy had her timing to perfection and totally embraced this character in all its complexities, with an excellent performance

They say opposites attract and this is obviously the case with **Tony** and Angela. Tony, who is a leather-clad smoothie, enters the living room and immediately starts flirting with fun-loving Beverley, who has no hesitation in responding much to Laurence’s irritation and retaliation later on. Initially there is little dialogue for Toni (mainly because his wife answers for him) but nevertheless good acting still has to take place even without dialogue and Toni inhabited his character with great aplomb, conveying a person that sought pleasures anywhere he could get them but also demonstrating he was compliant with his wife’s suffocating attitude, because she looked after him. A really excellent and convincing performance with great acting skills.

Our last guest of the party arrives and this is **Susan** (Jane Quill) and it is obvious from the outset that Susan is different to her neighbours. Susan is the mother of Abigail, aged 15 years, and it is revealed that Susan has reluctantly permitted Abigail to hold a party in the family home, from which Susan has been excluded for the event. It was excellent the manner in which Jane conveyed the worried and puzzled mother, who really did not understand her 15 year old daughter because their personalities were so different, (Abigail’s being closer to Beverley’s). Initially, Susan’s dialogue is confined to ‘yes and ‘no’ answers and the way in which this character has been written really supports the personality of it. Once again, just because dialogue is limited in the extreme, does not mean you stop acting, and Jane did a superb job in conveying the disquiet she felt, not only in leaving her daughter but in joining her neighbours for drinks, with whom, initially, she has little in common and the disquiet she felt in their company. This was evident from her body language, and the manner in which she

delivered her, initially, limited dialogue. As the layers on onion are peeled off, it becomes obvious that Jane and Laurence have much in common and have 'like minds'. A really lovely performance by Jane, which clearly drew out the character of Susan so well and complimented and contrasted the other players to perfection.

A drama about disintegrating relationships has the potential to send one home feeling somewhat down beat. This was not the case at all in this excellent production and I left the fond farewell, feeling I had experienced a first class and most enjoyable evening. The director and players brought to the production such energy and vigour, and importantly the constant aspect of fun and vitality never left this piece. Even when Laurence was dying of a heart attack and no-one was noticing (one almost wanted to call out 'look behind you' panto style), Beverley continues to make this particular drama all about her, until Angela brought her nursing skills to the fore, this only highlighted the self-centredness of Beverley and to an extent, Angela, Susan being the only caring one amongst them. The performers blended so well with each other, each drawing out their different characters, with such lovely contrasts between them all.

Mention must be made of the excellent music and sound effects (by **Roger Dishley**). I have noted *I believe in Miracles*, Feliciano music, *Come on Baby Light My Fire*, Elvis's *Don't* all used to good effect at the most appropriate of times. I particularly noted the quiet, background music that was playing, that one would hear in this way from a 'noisy neighbour's' party – this work so well and supported the believability of a party taking place in the Close. As always, the Lighting Design and Operators (**Pete Balls & Vicky Prior**) did an excellent job in enhancing the overall production with the lighting effects. Mention has been made of the costumes previously and **Krystyna Kobiak** was first class in sourcing appropriate costumes for this fun-filled era, and also in ensuring the hairstyles/moustaches etc were appropriate for the mid 70s – well done.

### **Programme**

Thank you for providing me with a programme (by **Thomas Cobb**), an essential part when one is writing a review. It was nicely laid out, clear and easy to read and importantly, informative.

It was a joy to meet the cast and director and your other members after the performance and to hear more about the technical challenges, and the ideas behind the staging. The wallpaper really set the scene and well done for sourcing such an excellent example of the period.

Once again, thank you for your invitation and I very much look forward to seeing you in the future.

*Pam Armstrong*

**Regional Councillor  
NODA London**



